

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

OF

SIR EGERTON BRYDGES, BART.

ETC.

VOL. II.

THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY,
 TIMES, OPINIONS,
 AND CONTEMPORARIES

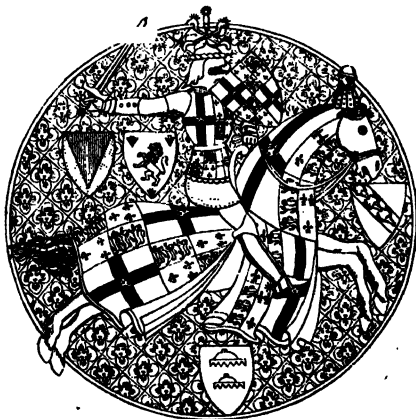
OF

ROBERT COLTON BRIDGES,

1812-1887

BY
 HENRY COLTON BRIDGES

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.



Most men
 Are cradled into poetry from wrong ;
 They learn in suffering what they teach in song.
 SHILLLEY.

C O N T E N T S

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

OF

SIR EGERTON BRYDGES, BART.

CHAPTER I.

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dys—Thomas Stanley—Origin of the Hammonds—Situation of St. Alban's Court—Hammond alliances—All these names connected with literature—Blind pedigrees—Advantages of distinguished birth—The unmental pay regard only to wealth and rank in possession—Fame regards descendants—How far blood operates—Pressing wants allow not ideal speculations—Despondence—Thellusson property—Lord Bridgewater's Will.

IN November, 1800, died Lady Brydges' paternal uncle, Matthew Robinson, second Lord Rokeby, of Armagh, aged eighty-seven. He had succeeded his cousin, the first peer, who was primate of Ireland, in 1794. He was born in 1713, probably at York, or perhaps at Cambridge, where resided the learned Dr. Conyers Middleton, who had re-married his maternal grandmother, which lady was the heiress of the Morris's of Horton, near Hythe in Kent,—a seat which he finally himself inherited from his mother, and where he spent the greater part of his life, and breathed his last.

He was an eccentric, but a truly excellent and magnanimous character; on the course of whose life it is delightful and edifying to look back. The Robinsons settled at Rokeby in Yorkshire in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Thomas Robinson of Rokeby was killed in the civil wars, 1643, leaving several sons by Frances, daughter of Leonard Smelt, Esq., of Kirby-Hetham. William, the eldest son, was grandfather of William, whose eldest son, Sir Thomas Robinson of Rokeby, was created a baronet in 1730; and died without issue,

having sold Rokeby Park to Mr. Morritt. Richard, his younger brother, was promoted to the bishopric of Killala in 1751, and elevated to the archbishopric of Armagh, and primacy of Ireland, in 1764. In 1777 he was made an Irish peer, by the title of Lord Rokeby, with collateral remainders to his cousins, the Robinsons of Horton in Kent, who were descended from Sir Leonard Robinson, younger son of Thomas Robinson, by Frances, daughter of Leonard Smelt. The primate was a munificent public character, honoured and beloved; and dying at a great age in 1794, unmarried, the Irish peerage and English baronetage descended to Matthew Robinson of Horton, who thus became second Lord Rokeby. He was then at the age of eighty-one: he represented Canterbury in Parliament at the latter end of the reign of George II.; and was so much beloved and respected there to the last, that he had great influence on all elections: his younger brother Charles, recorder of Canterbury, was returned for that city, 1780 and 1784. He came into possession of the Horton estates about 1745; for his father lived till 1778, aged eighty-five.

When he took possession of Horton, he laid down a plan of life peculiar to himself. He resolved to be shackled by no ceremonies, but to pass his days in independence, according to what it seemed to him that nature pointed out: he kept no carriage; he never mounted a horse; he

allowed no liveries to his servants ; but his house-keeping was bountiful, and his hospitality generous and large. He was a resolute and unbending Whig, formed on the principles of Algernon Sydney and Locke ; and he carried his arguments much farther than in those days the people were accustomed to. Accustomed to think only for himself, he sometimes indulged in crude ideas, and his style was inelegant and harsh. He carried his hatred of the artificial through every thing ; he took down his garden walls, and let his hedges drop, that his herds and flocks might have their full range. He hated the plough, and let his arable fields run to natural grass : so that his park became very large and picturesque, merely by letting it alone : he was skilful in the management of cattle, and, as his land was rich, his stock was fat and profitable.

He had some strange notions about money, and rarely put it out at interest : he kept a sum of money in gold for above fifty years in chests in his house, which, at compound interest, would have accumulated to £100,000 ; and he had at his death above £20,000 lying in the hands of different bankers, of which a great part had lain there for many years : he had also money in many of the continental banks. He had no faith in the public funds, and always predicted that they would break ; a prediction which he contended was fulfilled when the bank was

restricted from cash-payments in 1797 ; yet it was not very reasonable to fear the national bank, and trust private banks. It must be admitted that he entertained some crotchets in his head.

His clothes were plain to a degree that many would call mean ; and latterly he let his white beard grow down to his waist. He was a great walker, and stalked along with his staff, like an aged peasant. His voice was loud, but his manners were courteous, and he knew the world well. He was sagacious, manly, and uncompromising. He had a great contempt for provincial importance ; and therefore was not in great favour with some of the neighbouring gentry, who knew not how to estimate that dignity of mind which despised those outward trappings of superiority on which they prided themselves. By the yeomanry and peasantry he was adored as their protector and benefactor.

He was a great reader, but not of works of imagination. His taste turned to politics, voyages, and travels. As he loved plainness, so he did not relish the more refined parts of literature. He was the reverse of his father, who was never happy out of the high and polished society and clubs of London, and thought a country life a perfect misery. The father and son were not very fond of one another, and each was angry at the other's taste.

In every thing Lord Rokeby was manly and

straightforward : he had no dark and hidden passions : he was free from the slightest taint of envy or jealousy : he was nobly generous, while he knew the full value of money ; so much so as to appear to superficial observers miserly. His very simple and humble dress was mistaken by many for avarice.

When now, and then some stranger of rank came into the country, and paid him a visit through curiosity, founded on the absurd rumours of his eccentricities and hermit-life, he was surprised to meet with a man, though singular in his dress, yet a man of the world in his manners and conversation ; ready, acute, easy, and full of good sense, with a power of sarcastic dignity which put down the smallest attempt at impertinence or misapprehension.

He retained his faculties to the last ; and I believe had enjoyed his earthly being altogether more than any other person I could name. He had an estate in Yorkshire as well as Kent, of which I do not know the exact extent, and of which he never raised the rents ; and he might have died immensely rich in personal property if he had made interest of his money.

He was a striking contrast to his sister, the celebrated Mrs. Montagu of Portman Square, the author of the " Essay on the Genius of Shakspeare," who died in August, 1800, three months before him, at the age of eighty. She was a woman of brilliant

imagination and acquirements, and lived all her days in the full tide of high life, of which it was her weak vanity to be too fond. Her husband and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's husband were first-cousins. Her mind had had literature infused into it from her childhood by Dr. Conyers Middleton, who was married to her grandmother. She had formed an early friendship with the old Duchess of Portland, the heiress of the Harleys. Her wit and fund of observation, sentiment, and reflection, showed themselves in her letters, from her earliest years: but all her ambition was to shine amid the highest ranks of society; and this induced her to marry a man of a noble family, splendidly allied,—though many years older than herself.

She was good-natured, generous, candid, and obliging: but her vanity and love of flattery made her sometimes not quite sincere. No one knew characters better;—she saw a foible in an instant, but she generally forbore to expose it. The fault of her letters is, that she was too ambitious of being witty and rhetorical; so that one is not always sure what were her sincere opinions. There was a littleness in her extreme and ostentatious vanity, very unworthy of her. She was acquainted with all the great literary men of her day, and had her house open to them; but her most intimate friend was George Lord Lyttelton. She had the talent of drawing

the characters of those eminent men whom she knew; and it is a subject of deep regret what has become of her best letters; for those published are assuredly the worst. Her correspondence was inexhaustibly voluminous. Some one asking about her nephew, a noble lord of some wit answered:—"He!—why, he is only fit to darn his aunt's blue stockings!"—He is gone to his fathers; and this may now be related as an innocent anecdote.

Mrs. Montagu was too fine a lady, really to reconcile herself to the manners of Dr. Johnson; and she could not forgive his contemptuous "Life of Lord Lyttelton." Johnson revenged himself by occasionally speaking of her in a disparaging manner: but he was very inconsistent on this subject: sometimes he spoke of her,—or at least to her,—with a flattery approaching to the fulsome. I find in Miss Reynolds's "Recollections of Johnson," annexed to Croker's edition of Boswell's Life of this extraordinary man, vol. v. p. 394, the following passage:—

"This brings to my remembrance the unparalleled eulogium which the late Lord Bath made on a lady he was intimately acquainted with, in speaking of her to Sir Joshua Reynolds. His lordship said that he did not believe that there ever was a more perfect human being created, or ever could be created, than Mrs. Montagu. I give the very words I heard from Sir Joshua's mouth;

from whom also I heard that he repeated them to Mr. Burke,—observing, that Lord Bath could not have said more:—‘And I do not think that he said too much,’ was Mr. Burke’s reply. I have also heard Dr. Johnson speak of this lady in terms of high admiration.”

Her “*Essay on Shakspeare*,”—though some have affected to despise it,—is a very eloquent and beautiful piece of criticism, which none but an author of great genius could have produced. She would have been a very useful, brilliant, and copious author, if she had not been diluted by worldly ambition.

Her sister, Mrs. Scott, who died in 1795, the author of the “*Life of d’Aubigné*,” had great literary talents and vast information, especially in history; but she had not the liveliness, wit, and imagination of Mrs. Montagu.

The Rev. William Robinson, younger brother of Lord Rokeby and Mrs. Montagu, was born about 1726 or 1727. He was educated at St. John’s College, Cambridge, and had a great turn for literature, which perhaps he partly imbibed from Dr. Conyers Middleton, where it is probable he formed his first intimacy with Gray the poet, whose friendship he retained till that amiable author’s lamented death in 1771. About the year 1765 his friend Mrs. Coelia Scott (one of the family of Scott’s Hall) gave him the small rectory of Denton, near Canterbury; and when

he came to reside there, he rented of her the old mansion, which she obtained by devise from Captain Whorwood, R. N. About the same time his father had purchased for him of the Shrewsbury family the next presentation to the rich rectory of Burfield, near Reading, Berkshire. Here he died in December, 1803, aged about seventy-seven. He was an excellent scholar, and Gray had a very high opinion of his taste. He is noticed in Gray's letters about 1767, where Gray gives to Dr. Wharton an account of a visit he paid to him at Denton. He was an indolent man—of polished manners, but sometimes apparently slow and dreamy,—till a little provoked, when he became sharp and contradictory;—now and then, a little humorsome and petulant; liberal and violent in his political principles;—unaffected; a despiser of show, and impatient of artifice. He was a lover of the arts, and very well versed in them. He had travelled in Italy, and was an excellent judge of pictures. In literary composition his taste was severe; and he loved plainness so much, that one of his favourite authors was Dr. Franklin. He was a handsome man,—something above the middle height,—but rather clumsily made. With great seeming humility, he was rather proud, and fired like his brother at the smallest liberty taken with him. He married a lady with a good fortune, and, receiving part of the estates of his eldest brother by will in

1800, died rich. Lady Brydges is his youngest daughter.

From what I have said, it will be clear that those Robinsons of Horton and Rokeby have been endowed with faculties which have entitled them to a distinction not very common. Where will a family be found which has produced so brilliant a star as Mrs. Montagu?

My uncle was a sportsman to the last, and my father had been so. In this respect their taste was not congenial with that of their neighbour, Mr. Robinson, who had an aversion and contempt of these amusements. But as their houses were scarcely half a mile asunder, they associated continually together, and the children of the two families were always playfellows. The politics of the gentlemen also disagreed: my father and uncle were not such ultra-Whigs as Mr. Robinson.

The family of Hammond of St. Alban's Court in Nonington, of whom the grandfather of the present possessor of that estate married my mother's elder sister, had been established there for above two centuries. They had allied themselves well in the reigns of James I. and Charles I. with the ancient and honourable families of Aucher and Digges, and had been knighted by King James I. James Hammond, the elegiac poet, was grandson of Anthony, a younger son of this house. Their more immediate ancestor, William,

elder brother of this Anthony, published a volume of very rare poems, which I reprinted some years ago. His grandmother's brother was George Sandys the poet; and one of the daughters of this family was the mother of Thomas Stanley the poet, the learned editor of *Æschylus*, &c. My aunt Hammond died in 1770, and her husband in 1773; their eldest son in 1821, aged seventy. It is an extraordinary circumstance of this family of Hammond, that they had been tenants of this estate, which was an appendant grange to the Abbey of St. Alban's, before the dissolution of religious houses.

St. Alban's Court is about five miles distant from Wootton; and there was a continual intercourse between us, —not always perhaps entirely cordial; for my mother's sister was an imperious, impatient, envious woman, and her husband very weak and shy. The Hammond blood was full of provincial prejudices, and thought the race of Aucher and Digges greater than all the historic lustre of all the Egertons. The late Mr. Hammond had many generous and ductile qualities, and was altogether good-natured, though fretful; but was not very wise. By a lucky marriage he restored the fortune of the family, which had been long decaying. Mr. Payter, whose sister was mother of Sir Herbert Taylor, married the late Mr. Hammond's sister; and Sir Herbert's sister is mother of Mrs. Stanley, wife of

the present very distinguished secretary of the colonial department,

I have thus gone through a course of names which have connected themselves with literature and history :—with any others I am reluctant to fill these pages : provincial antiquity is respectable and useful in its own limits. I would preserve them for the sake of the peasantry round them ; but they are not fitted to interest general readers.

I believe they call a provincial horse, not known on the great arena of Newmarket, a blind horse, whose pedigree and history may be falsified without easy detection : so it is with provincial families ; but this cannot be done with names known in literature and history.

But it may be said that if one in his own person arrives at a just distinction, what signifies it if he is the first of his name or blood who has done so ? Is it not rather the more merit in him ? But do we not give easier credit to blood already eminent ? Do we not yield to the superiority with less reluctance ? Do we not think it more probable that our favourable judgment is right ? It is said we “ war not with the dead ; ”—so it is with those to whom our ancestors have submitted ;—there is not the same jealous and painful rivalry of them. Thus we bow to old nobility, but are irritated at new.

Brutal beings without mind know nothing but

actual wealth and actual rank in possession at the moment: they cannot look to the past or the distant; they can see nothing in reflected light. On them therefore such memorials of those who are gone to the grave make no impression: they make an estimate by the same rules of themselves as of others. If pressed by poverty or obscurity, they have no elevation of spirit to support themselves by retrospect.

What is among the main inducements to toil for fame and respect? Is it not to place our posterity in a state to command regard? Is it not the principle of all government to carry rewards down to the descendants of those who deserve well of their country? Many say that there can be nothing in blood to confer moral or intellectual virtue. Some have sprung up into splendour without it; and on many it has been thrown away. Some it makes lazy, and some it lulls to indulge in vice; but still the chances are in its favour.

But here are the facts: let the reader make what comments he chooses upon them. If he considers them dry and barren facts, he may pass lightly over them. If he thinks that they are coloured or exaggerated, let him show that they are so. If he says that he already knows them, his memory will not be much troubled by the recognition.

All these, however, may perhaps be light and superfluous considerations, except to those who

are idle and at ease. With many the pressing calls and anxieties of life are too numerous to leave room for them. The evils incident to humanity are indeed frightfully great. Few have seen more of them than I have. I am not apt to despond, but sometimes my courage gives way; and then I grow feeble, and my mind and body prey upon each other. I doze in languor, rather than sleep; and when I sleep, I find no refreshment from it.

See the villany of the world: see what use has been made by lawyers and agents, of the princely estate of Thellusson! They have actually for above thirty years eat up the whole income within a few hundreds! What dependence is there on courts of law, or of parliament, when they did not set aside that most wicked and insane will? It was in part to prevent and crush the canvass that was going on in the upper house in 1803, to set aside that horrible will, that the thunder of the house was denounced upon the silly circular letter of the Chandos claimant. In the Thellusson case they were not so foolish as to print a circular, and therefore could not be attacked in a direct way. But I have seen as much of the villany of lawyers, though not upon so great a scale, as the Thellusson heirs.

What have the courts been about that they did not check these rapacities? Were there no masters to tax costs? But perhaps the charges were

of a nature which did not come within a master's jurisdiction. The truth is, that all these harpies favour one another. I have found that lawyers take from seventy-five to ninety per cent on an average; sometimes as high as eight hundred per cent: viz. their charges have been about £2300 for what, when taxed, the legal charge was only £331. 7s. 6d.; and taken the greater part of it in advance too! stopping it out of money passing through their hands. In twenty years they have thus taken nearer £100,000 than £50,000 from me and mine; their regular law-charges alone amounting to upwards of £2500 a year, and under the name of what they call their cash-payments—many of which were no payments at all—nearly as much. In no other country of the world are there, or ever have there been, such abuses of this kind as in England.

I am told that General John, Earl of Bridgewater, made an attempt at a will, something of the nature of Thellusson's. I was at Geneva at the time of his death, and have not seen that will. He was a very weak, proud, and offensive man. I knew a little of him from the time I was a child, but never found any good in him. With all the immense wealth of his latter days he was proverbially mean in money matters. When I first knew him he was a cornet of dragoons.

CHAPTER II.

Gibbon's "Autobiography" — His vanity and foibles—Some of his characteristics—His family—Randolph, the American President—Uselessness of collateral relationship—The author's love of independence—His contempt of modern nobility—The bitter prejudices it draws on him—Jews and attorneys—Inefficacy of ill-founded abuse—Wickedness of anonymous attacks—The world has too much sagacity to be long deceived—Charlatanism—What knowledge is valuable—Literature necessary to a polished society—Temporary fame—Permanent merit—Thurlow and Rosslyn contrasted with Gibbon and Robertson—Fame justly allotted after death—Artificial rules of composition condemned—Genius must not work by model—Gray sometimes too laboured—The author's fate to be thwarted and damned with faint praise—Accused of querulousness—Has never been idle—Success the world's test of merit—But the world gives success to craft and impudence—The record of opinions the proper subject of literary biography—The task perilous—Merit no security against criticism—Truth not interesting if trite—Injury of self-delusion—Uses of solitude—Vexations of society—Conceit of the busy—Literature too much carried on by management and cunning—No trust to be put in the advice of others—Elevation of thought—Baseness of petty watchfulness—A mean compliance with the world not necessary—Exhortation to perseverance—Various minds must rely on various merits—Humiliation of being a cipher—Author's desire to make a sober estimate of his own works—Has written in all humours—Does not look back with shame on what he has done.

GIBBON had not the courage to give to the world his "Autobiography" during his life. He was a

wonderful man, but he had many vanities and some weaknesses. Colman has given a curious portrait of him, as inserted in a note of Croker's "Boswell." Rich as he was in erudition, and surely in genius,—for what but genius could have put together in so luminous a manner such an incredible extent of chaotic materials?—he yet was in his manners and person a finical coxcomb. He lived in an age of ceremonials, which have now passed away; and he had a silly desire to be thought a man of fashion and fine gentleman—a mean ambition for a man of such a splendid and accomplished mind. But these little passions were superseded by more noble ones; and he retired with an elevated courage to Lausanne to spend his latter days in literature and his own thoughts, and the beautiful scenery of Switzerland, and on the banks of the sublime Genevan lake. His "Memoirs" are pleasing, and will always be an instructive record of indefatigable literary toil; but they are not to my taste of the highest class of memoirs; they partake a little of the quaintness of the author's manners. He appears too much in his full dress. They want energy, and simplicity, and frankness, and high bursts of eloquence. His father appears to have been a vain man, of feeble resolution, and morbid feelings. He was himself vain of his birth; but he knew little of the history of his family beyond his grandfather: his great-grandfather having moved

out of Kent, where all his ancestors had lived, the link was nearly lost. When young, I suppose he had no curiosity about those things, for my father, when he dined at Wootton, about 1761, could have given him the whole history. He would have been interested by the story of the derivation of old John Randolph, the American President, whose death has been announced within the present month (July, 1833). * I do not recollect that the historian mentions the connexion of his family with the Yorkes, of whom he would have been justly proud. Charles Yorke, who died at the moment of accepting the seals of chancellor, 1770, was a man of beautifully intellectual character. Lord Chancellor Hardwicke's mother was, as I have said before, a Gibbon, and the widow of my great-grandfather Edward Gibbon, who was her cousin. I have a few letters of Charles Yorke to my father, but they are of no importance.

As to collateral relationship, it is, except as an object of curiosity, of no value whatever. I know nothing personally of collateral relations, and do not desire to know them. I never received a civility from them, and would not cross the road to bow to them. I glory in my

* See the notes to my poem on "The Lake of Geneva." Geneva, 1831. 2 vols. 8vo.

independence: I never yet sought the acquaintance of any one. I frankly confess that I consider the greater part of the modern nobility to be insolent *parvenus*; and, consequently, I desire not to have any communication with them. This is one of those confessions which, I am aware, will give great offence; but I have received injuries from them which can never be repaired; and so has Lord Banbury. It is clear, from what Lord Redesdale said, in what spirit they judge of old claims. No one can forget how they received Lord Byron.

I prepare myself for violent and bitter attacks; sarcasm, detraction, misrepresentation, and ridicule will be at work. Vanity, conceit, false pretension, spleen, and envy will be imputed to me: I shall be blackened by the corrupt emissaries of modern wealth; and all the Jews and attorneys in England will set up one loud and yelling clamour against me, like the bellowing cry of kenneled hounds in an angry uproar. And they would, if they could, eat me up too, and tear me limb from limb as they tear up a beast of prey!

But ill-founded abuse and malignant criticism finally defeat themselves. If these could destroy, what statesman could live? Living poets too, of great fame and lustre, have been covered with bitter censure and ridicule,—and yet they sur-

vive! If Nature has given me any faculties above the common, cruel vituperation cannot take them away; if she has denied them, forbearance cannot bestow them on me.

The assassin who stabs in the dark, in the mask of an anonyme, deserves no mercy. His cruel cowardice proves him to be the worst species of demon. Sometimes he uses a poisoned weapon from malice, and sometimes for hire. The business of just criticism is to expose charlatan-ism,—not to degrade an enemy or a rival. Dulness may be left to itself: it will sink by its own weight. If what I have written is trite or foolish,—if my sentiments are mean or affected,—if my facts are trifling or inaccurate,—if my language is heavy and vulgar,—then I must submit to the fate which these faults deserve. But I will not yield to the sentence of false and unqualified judges; nor of prejudiced, ill-humoured, and base judges.

There is a sound sagacity in the world which it is impossible long to deceive. Nothing but folly can entertain the hope of a successful deception; and it is extraordinary that charlatanism should ever succeed for a time. But it often has its reign, though a transient one. This must be effected by the cry of the mob before reason has had an opportunity to be heard. There is no doubt that false and factitious beauties often catch the mob.

7

Is a charlatan conscious of his charlatanism? Perhaps not always, but generally. He can scarcely be ignorant of the use of tricks and artifices. He knows whether he seeks truth, or only plausibility: he knows whether he writes from conviction, or only for show. His business is to say what is true, yet in some degree recondite—what, if said before, has not been so well said, or requires to be revived. Whence does such knowledge come? It does not come from books, for that is already before the public; it comes from the fountain of the brain, which draws its resources from within. But may not memory supply what we believe to be our own? In some minds this self-deception may take place; in others not. Innumerable books are published without a single idea taken from the native spring of the author's own mind. But are not borrowed thoughts better than the author's own, if crude and erroneous? The answer is, that neither of them ought to be endured.

There are those who are under the dominion of a passion for book-making. If they have no inborn powers, it is a very foolish and troublesome passion. It encumbers shelves, weakens attention, degrades literature, and withdraws funds which ought to be reserved to support genius and merit.

But a polished society could scarcely exist without literature: they who do not read, or read

little, derive knowledge and refinement of thought indirectly from literature, because it enriches conversation, and gives it more precision as well as more elegance. There can be no dependence on what is not written ; it is fugitive and elusive.

The fame of men, of whose minds the fruits are spent upon their contemporaries, soon dies : of excellent authors the labours are permanent, and increase in value and reputation with time. Make the comparison in what degree of liveliness exists the memory of Johnson and Burke at this day, when set against that of Pitt and Fox ! Compare Lord Chancellor Thurlow, Lord Rosslyn, or even Lord Mansfield, with Gibbon or Robertson ! Even Cumberland is still familiar to us ; while Lord North, to whose greatness he looked with such humble reverence, is fading fast from our recollection ;—while Goldsmith, who lost his presence of mind before the pompous splendour of the first Duke of Northumberland, lives on every one's lips at the time when the forgotten duke is entombed in peerage-books. “ But,” says the dull and mean materialist, “ let us live while we live, and when our bones are mouldering in the dust, need we care what becomes of memory and adulation ? When we repose in the cold earth we shall not hear the voice of Fame, let it sound as loud as it will.”

There is a stern justice, by which they who have aspired to fame will be measured when they

are dead. Spiteful critics will no longer attack them, nor the *clique* of party-prejudice protect and exalt them. During life interested leaders give the tone, and the indiscriminating multitude slavishly repeat. But adventitious recommendations and technical merits will, when the body descends to the grave, no longer inspire the relics. What is formed of dying matters will die with its enclosure.

It is hateful to hear critics talk about artificial rules of composition, as if a literary production was a piece of joinery or cabinet-work! What signifies a cold correctness, a laboured method, a finish, which, while you cannot find fault with it, you sleep over? When an effusion is all fire and eloquence, "O, it is very well!" they cry; "full of spirited things and a vigorous originality; but it is not done in a workmanlike way." These are men who want to make literature a piece of mechanism! It is the business of genius

To snatch a grace beyond the reach of art.

Genius is not to work by models; the same rules and processes will not apply to different minds. It is lucky that they will not, for what is so attractive as variety? Like the diversified style of Burke, from the most pithy brevity of a few words to sentences as long as a page, and from a familiar and unadorned diction to the highest degree of poetical splendour and sublime imagery!

There are subjects necessary to be treated with a perfect clearness of method, and a logical precision of argument; but is this necessary or proper upon all occasions?

There is no doubt that Gray laboured some of his compositions too much, and that this often rendered him abrupt and obscure, and the train of his ideas interrupted, so that the reader cannot follow them without great pains, and without the aid of notes. This is an essential fault in poetry, and absolutely destroys eloquence, which, if it cannot carry the reader or hearer simultaneously along with it, fails in its purpose. Toil and correction always break the natural train of ideas; and what it requires toil to write, it requires toil to understand. Dull men do not like to hear of this, and always dispute it with spleen and spite.

From my very boyhood every thing has been done to thwart me, and to prevent the pursuits to which nature inclined me. Where was the cheer? I never heard it: but I had to encounter cold, freezing, palsy'ng looks; and every one knew how to

Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And, without sneering, teach the rest to sneer!

These assertions will be deemed very querulous; but if they are true, the epithet is not applicable to them. Some like to boast of the

favours* they have received, and the flattery which has been heaped upon them: they think it recommends them, while they put every insult into their pockets, and smile upon the insolent or the malignant who spit upon them. They do not hate the less in their hearts: while smiles are without, poison is within. Anger vents itself by speaking out; but nursed inwardly, it is destruction.

There are those who will observe, that if I have not been cheered, it was because I did not deserve cheers. My only reply to this is, "*Meâ virtute me involvo.*" I know that I have not been idle; and I know that my love of literature has been ardent and pure. It is strange if in so many years of inexhaustible toil I have always failed.

But many, perhaps the great mass of mankind, cannot be persuaded that there can be any other satisfactory proof of merit than success. They worship success by whatever means it is acquired; and neglect and persecution they take to be sore evidences of worthlessness. Providence allows this ungenerous ignorance, and these cruel wrongs, to go on in this world: since the fall of man, craft and fraud, or audacious impudence, will always carry the day; and simple desert may go in rags and starve.

The base cannot be brought to think that there is any other happiness or power than in money, and therefore they will attempt to get

money in whatever way they can ; nor will their conscience restrain them from any thing, however wicked, which they can do with impunity.

Let not the censorious reader pronounce the record of these opinions to be irrelevant to my subject. If the autobiography of a literary man is allowable, the register of his opinions must necessarily form his principal aim. The rectitude of those opinions is submitted to intelligent thinkers and observers. In a general book of literature, these may be general ; where the subject is the life of an individual, these also must be individual. The task is perilous. If the thoughts want justness, sagacity, and depth, the effect will be that the memorialist exposes, instead of recommending, himself. And this he is sure to do if he has not the talent, of which his belief or conceit induces him to undertake the task.

Not that all the talent and genius in the world will secure him from criticism and cavil. There are hundreds who live upon the bitter food of objection, censure, and malice ; they draw their subsistence from furnishing these stimulants to the corrupted appetites of others. But *magna est veritas, et prævalebunt* ! I believe that nothing can counteract the final triumph of truth. But if there be a want of soundness, then the spear of acute criticism blows up the deception.

But sound truth will not do, if it be trite or

dully told—if it throws out no light! A warmth of style, and a force of expression, are necessary. There must be a selection of topics, and a novelty and happiness of combination. The vigorous ingredients must not be intermixed and diluted with tedious inanities. If there be expansion, it must not be stretched to feebleness. All must be at once luminous, transparent, and strong.

If there be a self-delusion in an author, which prompts him to venture without these qualifications, he will do himself an injury; but perhaps not an unendurable injury. He may be only confounded with those whom criticism often attacks so virulently without the smallest pretence; and thus the chances are that he will console himself. We love fame, and Providence has instilled this passion into us for wise purposes; but we can do without it. It is, as it has been so often called, but a bubble. It has no substance,—it will not supply life,—it is nothing in solitude. Men of fame are often nothing but puppets of straw, whom a touch of fire will consume.

In solitude a man is lord of himself; he may defy the malign caprice of the multitude; and if he feels the defiance in his own conviction, the evil dominion over him is gone. To worship the seeming great of the world, is a baseness of which there is no hope. Many of them are

the weakest as well as the most contemptible of beings. All the grounds on which they build their title to distinction are false. Their haughty reserve is nothing but a trick to hide their emptiness. They use forms to keep off approach, knowing that they cannot bear a near inspection.

There is so much vexation in society to him who is too virtuous to bend to it, that it is far better to keep out of it. In that state the greater part of the weapons of malice cannot reach us. But how are we to employ ourselves? Do we love literature? Is not half the interest and use of literature thus taken away? Do we forego the spur of a just and spiritual fame? The more we influence from "the loop-holes of retreat," the more sure we are of our power. It is a favourable self-estimate, on which much of our happiness depends. We find means to persuade ourselves that in the deepest seclusion we may be of some importance.

The busy ones who do the work of society may think themselves the ablest and the wisest, but it is surprising to what ignorant and foolish heads and hands the management of human affairs is committed! Johnson makes the same remark, speaking of the late Lord Rosshyn, who was a perfect charlatan. This shows how much more effectually artifice and craft will produce individual success in life, than genius, talent, and knowledge.

Almost all literature is carried on by management and cunning. Most of the literary journals pander to a political party: they have other objects in view than to give an impartial judgment on literature. Countenance is to be given to authors who support certain doctrines, and they who repudiate them are to be depreciated. For this purpose very stupid men are often lauded, and great ones vilified.

If we disapprove the world and yet cannot alter it, is it wise to struggle with it? Let it go its own way, and let us go ours. But who can guess to what irreparable evils one erroneous step may lead? One may do wrong by his own judgment; but if he is to be guided by the opinion of another, what hope is there that he will do wisely? Gibbon speaks of the danger of advice: who, even if he be sincere, can enter into all the circumstances and feelings of another's situation? But not one in ten is sincere in the opinion he gives. He who takes an important step at the suggestion and pressure of another, is commonly lost. A ductile mind is always in danger of this; but, on the other hand, a blind self-opinion, carried to obstinacy, is worse.

Elevation of thought and sentiment is a primary gift, which is entitled to respect and admiration. It proves itself best in adversity, and is a sort of charm which keeps off taint and contumely. But we cannot be entirely spiritualized; our

earthly part must still be subject to earthly wants. Food and raiment, and a roof over our heads, are still indispensable. So far we are subject to the tyranny of human injustice and wickedness.

There is a destiny hangs over us: we are not entirely our own masters, and cannot carve for ourselves. It is cruel to lay, in every case, a man's non-success at his own door. There are often circumstances, not at his command, to which almost any other would have been a victim. They who are at their ease, and have never been put into peril, may talk very calmly and very sapiently; or may shake their heads with a hypocritical appearance of regret when they are secretly exulting in their hard hearts!

There is a baseness in that petty watchfulness and cunning fitted to carry one safe through the world which is loathsome! It is the instinct of an animal; not the wisdom of mind. Yet none have such conceit of their own good sense as these poor creatures. They smile with contempt upon the errors and misfortunes of genius and generosity.

It will be exclaimed, "We must live in the world as it is, and accommodate ourselves to its humours; and those are mischievous pursuits which are at war with it." Do such mean and immoral sentiments as these deserve a reply? We are to battle with the fool, the vicious, and the

devil. We are to seek abstract wisdom and purify the mind, come what will. But here comes another fight to maintain : we shall be attacked upon the ground we have chosen, and told we have no title to it.

Let him who has dedicated his life honestly to literature persevere. Who are they that attack him ? Who has placed them upon the judgment-seat ? What are their own pretensions to excellence ? They are not the *élites* of intellect—the beings of a higher order. If he is bold and firm, he will, should nature have been bountiful, rise in defiance of them.

It is not necessary that to make an author of merit there should be every varied kind of excellence. There have been such authors, but their rarity is extreme. All that is required is superiority in some line of intellect which qualifies him to instruct or to please. If he blunders on through a mist of ideas in which he does not see his own way clearly, it were better to throw down the pen. He can gain no honour ; and his labour is all lost. He toils but to show his own weakness and put his readers to sleep. If by the force of an original mind he can put his subject in a light of ingenious novelty, which, if not positively true, at least deserves consideration, he will entitle himself to an attention which will deserve notice, and be useful to others.

There is no thought so humiliating as to con-

sider oneself a useless incumbrance among one's fellow-beings ; to live as a cipher, and to die without being regretted or missed. One struggles to perform a part which few, if any, others can perform ; and draw off the veil from truth on points which few others have skill to clear away.

I often task myself to consider whether any literary work I have done is worth the time it has cost. I am willing, for the sake of self-complacence, to persuade myself that my labour has not been altogether uselessly spent : but I have generally doubts, and am never quite satisfied. Though I would wish to encourage and convince, I would not delude myself. I look back sharply, sternly, and anxiously on what I have done. I examine whether I have related what is worth knowing, and what is not elsewhere to be found. I scrutinize whether it has any traits of affectation, or insincerity, or inconsistency ; whether it is crude, or feeble, or borrowed, or superfluous ; whether the thoughts are obscure, or the language is vulgar. For inequalities or hasty expressions I care not.

I have written in all humours, and with every sort of rapidity ; in deep grief, in overwhelming misfortune, in indignant rage, in disappointment, in danger, and in destitution. Altogether I persuade myself that I have nothing to be ashamed of, or to repent. With harassed powers, and in mere despair, I have no doubt written some

things too slightly ; and I am accused too much in *currente calamo* : but, with only one exception, whatever of mine the public has least disapproved, has been written most hastily.

CHAPTER III.

Death of Mr. Maxwell in 1818—His father and mother—The happy days the author spent in his society—His intellectual and moral character—Mrs. Maxwell, the author's sister—Her sad death by an accident—Her person and character—The author's cordial agreement with Mr. Maxwell—His seat at Ewshot—Moor Park—His neighbours the St. Johns, of Dogmersfield—Their character—Mr. Lefroy, husband of the author's eldest sister—His birth and character—His hospitality—Mrs. Lefroy; her beautiful character, her attractions, and poetical genius—Her disastrous death by a fall from her horse—The Austens, neighbours of the Lefroys—Jane Austen, the novelist—The author has lived little with *literati*—Their deficiency of conversation—Advantages of frankness—Charles Fox—A lover of literature—Pitt no poet—Raleigh, Wotton, and Burleigh—Defects in parliamentary debates—Canning—Apology for the author's rambling in his subjects—He follows natural associations—Charms of Boswell's "Johnson"—Johnson's quickness in discrimination—A remark of Croker—Johnson's early habits unconquerably vulgar—He might be content with the society fitted to his class—The author an advocate for an ancient aristocracy—Johnson's reverence of rank—Man's importance depends on the power of thought—None comparable to Johnson in conversation—Scott and Byron—The passions at the mercy of the thoughts—Genius independent of opportunity and incident—Society tosses about people at its will—The result of Cowper's seclusion—Dangers of solitude—Some have their wits stirred by society—Necessary to look worldly greatness in the face—At present society turned topsyturvy—*Parvenu* nobility—Who may be called old peers—A radical party aim to abolish the Upper House—Peerage lowered in the eyes of the people—Mere personal merit incompatible with hereditability—What is impressed in the cradle cannot be washed away.

IN July, 1818, died my brother-in-law, Henry Maxwell, Esq. of Ewshot House, in the parish of

Crundal, in Hampshire, about four miles from Farnham, in Surry, in his seventieth year. He was educated at Westminster School, and at Christ Church, Oxford. His father was physician to the forces in Germany in Lord Chatham's war, and his mother was a co-heiress of an elder near branch of the noble house of Lascelles.* In addition to his property in England, he had a good estate in the West Indies, which he finally assigned to Lord Harewood.

In Mr. Maxwell's society I passed many of the happiest days of my life. He had an excellent and highly-cultivated understanding, multifarious reading, and a most extraordinary memory. He had an admirable taste, but a judgment a little inclined to the severe in literature. He was quick and sagacious, subtle, and almost metaphysical. He was shy to strangers, and so silent that few had any idea of his powers, which, as he had great self-possession in his faculties, and great clearness of words, was the more to be regretted. He was mild and benevolent in an eminent degree, and had every moral virtue. His manners were polished, and he lived elegantly and hospitably ; but his habits were retired, and he had a strange diffidence, which made him reluctant to go much into mixed society, especially after the death of

* See article "Harewood" in the last edition of "Collins's Peerage," 1812.

Mrs. Maxwell, who lost her life by the deplorable accident of her dress catching fire in Harley Street,* in March, 1789, aged about thirty-four. The same sad fate befell my second daughter, Mrs. Quillinan, in May, 1822, in her twenty-ninth year. Such seem to have been among the destinies of our family.

Mrs. Maxwell was beautiful, admired, beloved, and generally courted. She left an only daughter, an infant then a year old, who survived her but a short time. She made her house delightful to her visiters, and by her liveliness and goodnature won all hearts. In those days the establishments of well-ordered houses of men of fortune and education were kept up with an elegance which is now little regarded.

During the thirty-eight years that I knew Mr. Maxwell never a dispute or an angry word passed between us. He had ill health from a child, which made him sometimes grave, but not peevish. He was adored by all those who depended upon him; and I know not that he ever made an enemy. His charities were extensive and unintermitted. He had a little too much reserve, and was not without a quiet pride. His conversation was to me always delightful and always instructive. His house in London, when I was a young

* See "Gentleman's Magazine," March or April, 1789.

man living in chambers in the Temple, was always open to me, and there I found every kind of luxury and refined cheerfulness. Mrs. Maxwell had an extensive acquaintance, among whom I was of course thrown without the trouble of seeking them. I cannot think of those days without a mixture of delight and melancholy. If any one ever favoured me, and smiled upon me, Mr. Maxwell was the person; and his good opinion was doubly worth having, because he was a critic of refined taste, and a sound judge of mankind.

Mr. Maxwell's seat at Ewshot had once belonged to the ancient and knightly Hampshire family of Gifford, who had already intermarried with the Brydges family in the reign of Henry VIII., and afterwards was sold to a branch of the Bathursts. Mr. Maxwell devised it to my nephew, the eldest son of Mr. Lefroy, who had married Mrs. Maxwell's sister, and who died 1823, aged forty-two.

Thirty years have now elapsed since I visited that once-beloved house. Mr. Maxwell lent me that abode for six months in the winter and spring of 1786; and thence I used sometimes to ride to Moor Park, and meditate in Sir William Temple's gardens there. The nearest neighbour to Ewshot was Sir Henry St. John, of Dogmersfield, who changed his name to Mildmay for his wife's large fortune, and with whom I was familiar rather than friendly, for two or three years at college;—a

capricious, vain, ill-tempered man, with some minor talents and insufferable pretensions. I remember his father Sir Henry—a country squire and a toper, who had, however, represented the county, and was inoffensive and dull, and who latterly seldom stirred from his own table, or his own finely-wooded but rude park,* which had within memory been enclosed from an oak-common. Old Sir Paulet St. John, the grandfather, is said to have been the original of Fielding's Squire Western; but this I believe to have been a false rumour; for there were many traits in Sir Paulet's character totally discordant with those of Western. Sir Paulet loved the amusements of a roaring and sporting country squire; but he was crafty, plotting, ambitious, pushing, and overbearing. Horses, dogs, and the bottle were his delight, and he published a book of farriery. He did not die till about 1778, with a fortune much dilapidated.

Mr. Lefroy, who married my eldest sister, was also brought up at Westminster and Christ Church, and was afterwards Fellow of All Souls' College, as founder's kin. He was a man universally respected for his integrity, his conduct, his polished manners, and his social qualities. He had always lived in high society—perhaps he was

* Dogmersfield once belonged to the Wriothesleys, Earls of Southampton.

a little too ambitious of it, for who has not his little foibles? His house was always full of company, and he delighted to make every one happy. He had four maternal uncles—one was a General in the Austrian service; the youngest, Benjamin Langlois, was a diplomatist, and at one time under-secretary of state—a good and benevolent old man, with much diplomatic experience, but most fatiguingly ceremonious, with abilities not much above the common.

At Mr. Lefroy's house also, as well as at Mr. Maxwell's, I spent unnumbered days of happiness. Mrs. Lefroy was a woman more brilliant, more spiritual, and more beaming with goodness, than I have ever elsewhere seen. The charm of her first address was magical; her eyes were full of lustre; and the copiousness and eloquence of her conversation attracted all-ears and won all hearts. She had a warm and rapid poetical genius; she read voraciously; her apprehension was like lightning, and her memory was miraculous. She was spotless; and her heart was the seat of every affectionate and moral virtue. One fatal moment buried all these luminous virtues in the dust. In December, 1804, her horse ran away with her: she lost her courage, fell to the ground, and was dead in a moment, in her fifty-seventh year. Mr. Lefroy followed her to the grave in January, 1806, aged sixty-one.

The nearest neighbours to the Lefroys were the

Austens of Steventon. I remember Jane Austen, the novelist, a little child : she was very intimate with Mrs. Lefroy, and much encouraged by her. Her mother was a Miss Leigh, whose paternal grandmother was a sister of the first Duke of Chandos. Mr. Austen was of a Kentish family, of which several branches have been settled in the Weald, and some are still remaining there. When I knew Jane Austen I never suspected that she was an authoress ; but my eyes told me that she was fair and handsome, slight and elegant, but with cheeks a little too full. The last time I think that I saw her was at Ramsgate in 1803 : perhaps she was then about twenty-seven years old. Even then I did not know that she was addicted to literary composition :

I have not lived much with authors, though I have seen several, and corresponded with a few. I have seen enough to observe that authors seldom exhibit their minds in conversation, and that the best writers have often been the worst talkers. Perhaps this arises in part from the ambition to excel, and the fear of lowering oneself in the estimation of the listeners. But what Johnson says of Fox is more extraordinary—that he who so abounded in rich and copious oratory did not talk at the Literary Club. Mrs. Montagu, however,—as well as Burke—was eminent for her brilliant conversation.

If authors of genius would be frank, simple, and careless, there can be little doubt that their conversation would be superior to that of others. I cannot account why the genius of Fox did not appear much more in his writings than in his conversation. His oratory was original, deep, subtle, vehement, and expansive; his verses, which have been handed down to us, do not reach beyond an easy prettiness. They have no vigour, high sentiment, nor imagery, nor any force of abstract and recondite thought. Yet that he fondly loved literature is proved by his letters to Gilbert Wakefield. There is no eminent man about whose mind I am more puzzled. Pitt never attempted to compose poetry;—and he was right, for he would certainly have failed. Wise old statesmen have written very fair moral poetry,—such as Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Henry Wotton; but Burleigh had that sort of intellect which could not have indited a line.

Was ever an abstract truth elicited for the first time in a parliamentary debate?—I recollect no instance, except in the speeches of Burke. The utmost that the best of others arrive at is an ingenious application to the case in question. But this will not do in writing—in authorship we expect something more. Canning was original only in a sort of imaginative and rhetorical humour and wit—there lay his forte; but it had not much

the effect of spontaneous oratory—"it smelt of the lamp!" The reporters have the art sometimes of making decent speeches out of very bad ones.

Thus, from the nature of my undertaking, I wander from one subject to another. It is my purpose to communicate my observations and opinions, and I must follow them as the associations of my ideas bring them to my mind. I do not give a repetition of what is told in books—I speak from myself. But what if these opinions are blind and wilful, rather than the results of consideration and reflection? I adventure this chance at my own peril: they must submit to the test of wise men's judgment.

There may be many who spend their lives in a dull state of vacuity, and who see and hear all which passes around them without comment or mental apprehension. But as others are impatient to know, and restless till they can judge, they feel interested in the aid of those who have given their days and nights to intellectual labour. No one can be sure that he comes to right conclusions;—his best chance will be to compare them with those of other minds.

The charm of Boswell's "Johnson" is the register of the great moralist's opinions, though much caution must be used in distinguishing what he merely throws out in the heat of argument. Johnson's quickness in making distinctions and happiness of conversational illustration

were his greatest talent. It sometimes led him on to be sophistical for the sake of victory. In this collision he was more happy than in lonely contemplation. It provoked his energies, and forced off that morbid languor and diseased melancholy which were in his body and his mind.

Crocker remarks that though Johnson lived latterly at the table of wealth and luxury, he never mingled in the society of high life. The truth is, that his early habits were offensively vulgar, and every rank of life had then its own habits and ceremonials, which perhaps were carried too far; though great evils have arisen from throwing down, as at present, all barriers. No one ever yet entirely put off, when closely viewed, the familiar usages of his childhood. It would not therefore have been desirable for Johnson in those days to have much mixed with classes so much above him in mere station. And what would he have gained? Each class is well in its own way, but not to go out of it. Johnson, while he kept in his own order, was a thousand times greater than the highest of them. There was nothing which he could learn from them, except the smoothness of the surface. The loss was to them, not to him. I am for an ancient, inherited, and inheritable aristocracy, because I firmly believe it to be for the good of the whole;—but I am no servile worshipper of it; I would not for a moment submit to its insolence, nor pay any other

respect to it than the former ceremonials which attach to its precedence. And as to a *parvenu* aristocracy, I think it one of the greatest abuses of social institutions. If men think talents or wealth just grounds of distinction—as they are—let them rely on that on which they build their distinction. Though Johnson associated little with the great, he had the weakness to feel an adulatory reverence of them at the first address. He was in this respect the reverse of Swift, whose contrary extreme was, however, still more offensive and absurd.

It is by thought that man becomes important to the public: individual actions are limited in extent, and in their effects for the most part temporary. But he to whom Nature has not given the nice perception and fine feeling of high talents, must rest content with acquired and artificial knowledge. He gains by toil, and repeats by memory. His heart and his conviction are seldom in what he says. He is the mere conduit-pipe of intelligence, and not its fountain. Such an one's opinions require no register, because they are already to be found in books.

In my time I have not found men who conversed at all like Johnson—though several who excelled in humour and the relation of stories and *bon-mots*. Johnson had seen a diversity of literary characters, and been admitted into all the *pene-tralia* of authorship; and with a deep natural

sagacity he saw into these men's minds, and all their workings. The result was too much abatement of the respect which the world had paid them.

I knew Scott, who threw into his conversation the character of his writings; but I never saw Byron. I suspect that he did not converse very well, except by some momentary fit: he was too morbid, too jealous, and too irritable. His knowledge was irregular, and his whole mind a chaos of light and darkness. Bloomfield was dull in conversation; but humble, simple, mild, and unpretending. Some cultivate a technical art of conversation, which, if inoffensive, is apt to be quaint and insipid. It appears to me that the immediate results of conversation are seldom as instructive as the hints they elicit for future consideration.

The passions are in some degree at the mercy of the thoughts, as are the thoughts of the passions. It is a moral duty therefore to endeavour to think rightly. By dispelling false attractions we get rid of the danger of their delusions. But in the last age the greater part of those who shone most in thought and intellect—if literature is to be the proof of these—had no great opportunity of conversational light. Take Burns, Beattie, Cowper, Gray, Mason, Tom Warton, Joseph Warton, Darwin—they all lived in comparative seclusion. Not one of them much frequented the capital,

where alone a concentration of conversational powers is to be found.

If genius is independent of opportunity and accident, yet we may have a just curiosity to know the opportunities and accidents in the lives of those who possess it.

They who live in society are tossed about by the whirl of the external elements on which they are thrown. They do not move by their own force and at their own volition:—they are like some powerless animal borne along upon an irresistible torrent. Their strength is not from themselves, but from the stream by which they are hurried forward. Thus we see men make some figure in office, who when out of office show no talent at all. It is because the machinery of office bears them up. He who is lord of himself, and exists upon his own resources, is a noble but a rare being.

Cowper lived in utter seclusion, but speculated eloquently upon the moral world. He was not at the mercy of the opinions of the day; but looked upon things with his own uninfluenced mind. He saw the vanities of all the bubble passions and ambitions of bustling mankind. The simplicity and frankness with which he poured out his impressions have made him a favourite even with that multitude whose ways he despised. The worldling himself is frequently sick of the stir and dust in which he lives, and enjoys solitude—at least in

imagination. But these outbreathings are still more forceful in Cowley than in Cowper, because Cowley had been long involved in the toil and fever of public business. Charles Cotton and Sir Henry Wotton also are delightful praisers of solitude. Charles Fox, when he retired to St. Anne's Hill, felt intensely the quiet joy of solitude. Johnson alone, of speculative minds, had a horror of solitude.

There are, no doubt, some dangers in solitude. If the mind is subject to morbid illusions it will nurse them. To those disposed to indolence it will be an encouragement of that evil. It may foster humoursome selfishness, and spleen, and misanthropy. The bad passions are sometimes dispersed in the winnowing conflicts, as storms dissipate the vapours of bad air.

Some men think with most effect in society; it puts their faculties in motion—they want outward impulses. But these are almost always men without imagination. Now the imagination is the great endowment of the mind—without it no one can be truly spiritual. What comes within the experience of the senses is very limited. But what are called realities always fetter the mind, and disenchant it.

If they who would keep their heads and hearts in a state of loftiness cannot look worldly greatness in the face, it is their duty to seek retirement. The great ones of the world are always insolent,

and require to be firmly fronted. By such greatness I mean those who rest their consequence on adventitious circumstances—on their wealth, their titles, their offices, their establishments, and the rank of the circles in which they move. These people always feel an insulting confidence of their own arrogant superiority, till checked and abased. But, being intrinsically mean, they are as humble and obsequious to an enlightened courage, as they are disgustingly haughty to those whom they dazzle.

In these days, when all society has been turned topsy-turvy, such men are more numerous, and are doubly offensive. If they who wanted birth have extraordinary personal merit, their advancement may be excused; but this has not often been the case: they have got forward by intrigue, corruption, servility, and dishonesty. Look at the greater part of the men who have been advanced from nothing in the last fifty years—they are a miserable set—they have neither had virtues, nor talents, nor knowledge, nor even manners. The nobility who take a leading part in society and public business are almost all new nobility. Some of the richest nobles are new peers, or at least not old ones. I cannot call any one an old peer whose creation was subsequent to the death of Charles II.—in truth I think we ought not to include any in this class subsequent to the first ten years of James I. Queen Anne, soon after

her accession, created three or four, who have since been powerful—such as Gower, Conway, Hervey. As to what a peerage ought to be, politicians and theorists will always differ : there are too many selfish passions concerned in the consideration. There is a party now who are driving all their might to have no peers at all. Of course they will not succeed in this, unless there is to be a radical revolution.

The peerage has undoubtedly fallen very low in the estimation of the people in the last forty years. Many co-operating causes have produced this result ; and it has been a very unlucky one for the peace and subordination of society. The Upper House is not only a most useful but a necessary branch of the constitution ; but I will repeat—however distasteful the position may be—that it ought not to be filled with *parvenus*. If personal merit be set up as the plea, then the quality of hereditability must be abandoned ; for why is not the son of an old peer as likely to have personal merit as the son of a *parvenu* ? Is the attainment of high office the ground for this reward ?—Surely the office itself is reward enough. It is true that there ought to be two or three lawyers in the Upper House, but not twenty or thirty. And is every courtier and placeman to have his lucky promotions crowned by a peerage ?

We see of what stuff these new men are made : the smell of the old cask never leaves them. What

is impressed in the cradle is never washed away ; it is like the stain of blood on Lady Macbeth's arm. There is an equivocal class in the peerage, neither old nor new :—these are always playing between the two parties. When they think themselves safe, they attack the *parvenus* ; but they become liberals against the old feudal peerage.

CHAPTER IV.

Is it practicable to turn one's mind from painful thoughts?—Author reproached either way—A poetical temperament not fitted for the world—Virtue sometimes overleaps its bounds into vice—Villany of lawyers and agents—Thellusson case—They who have led a safe life have no mercy for a perilous one—Friendship empty—The worldling is always a boaster—Desire of a good name exposes us to incessant mortification—Defiance of the world—Coarseness and ferocity—Insults must be repelled—The author grave, but not gloomy—He is emancipated from all forms—Various expositions of what should constitute true poetry—Trickery and corruptness in poetry—Nature must not be overcoloured—Nature is always the same: it is the essence of fashion to change—Pictures of temporary manners an inferior order of poetry—Gray's "Elegy"—Pleasures of Imagination, Memory, and Hope—Mediocre poetry—The great poets never tire the reader—Every great poet is simple—Flowery diction admired by fools—Ornament only fit for what is pretty—Quality of invention to be regarded—Taste of matter-of-fact minds—In what words there is a charm—Poetry must be congenial to truth—Images coloured by passion—All of true taste love poetry—Not inconsistent with sound philosophy.

THERE may be a doubt whether to turn away one's mind from vexatious and agonizing thoughts is practicable; and if practicable, whether wise and right. If practicable, some contend that it encourages recklessness, and deludes us to throw off what ought to engage our deep consideration. In short, whatever we do, we shall find cavillers

and censurers. I sometimes resort to my imagination to escape from my unutterable woes : at other times my fears, my presages, my indignations, and my regrets, hang like barbed arrows upon my brain. In each case I am always blamed. When I escape, I am told it is a reckless flight ; when I dwell upon my sorrows, I am told it is an unmanly indulgence. When we experience neither candour nor justice in mankind, it almost drives us in despair to suppress every generous emotion, and to exist as long as we can in a state of carelessness, hardness, forgetfulness, and self-indulgence.

As to myself, all opposite capacities and duties have been always required of me. It has been demanded that sensitiveness and unruffled patience should each stop at the point where it answered the purpose of others,—and that I should change in a moment to opposite temperaments when it pleased these exacting beings to give the word. We cannot at once have hardness and tenderness, heat and cold, vivacity and dullness. We ought not to be too anxious about the good opinion of others : in proportion to our anxiety it will, out of mere perverseness, be denied to us.

A poetical temperament is of all others the least fitted to the world. Its inequalities, its transparencies, its frankness, its indignations, its ebbs and flows,—are all the reverse of craft : and

what but craft will the world be ruled by? "Well, then, if this be so," cry the censors, "let us have no more poetical temperaments." But the censor ought to recollect that he cannot make the world as he would have it. Providence has chosen to give poetical temperaments; and this grand reformer has no power to turn gold into lead, nor the sun's beams into ice. It is in the choice of him whom Nature has endowed with the poetical temperament to forbear from writing; but not in his choice to forbear from feeling as a poet.

We must forgive imperfections in human beings, and not wonder if, now and then, virtue overleaps its boundary into fault; but does vice ever overleap its boundary into virtue? They who neither have virtue, nor pretend to it, have this advantage—that they are great exacters and extortioners, but no payers. But it is better for those who have no virtue not to pretend to it: hypocrisy only aggravates the size of vice by the addition of another most flagitious crime.

I have known neither mercy, nor candour, nor just judges, in life: all has been stern call for ceaseless labours, to be neither recompensed nor cheered. The appetite of the extortioner increases by feeding;—

And where the fell attorney prowls for prey,

if you do not resist the first false charge of a few

pounds, he will go on till he gets £99. 19s. 6d. per cent of all your property. Let the Thellusson case be a crying instance. But he is not content with taking all ; it is one of his tricks to bring you in debt into the bargain, that he may hold a rod over you to keep you mute.

They who have had the good luck to choose a safe path,—from whatever cause, but which has more often than not arisen from stupidity,—always affect to be optimists, and will neither admit nor believe the dangers, and difficulties, and sufferings attendant upon life. The love to mortify and degrade is a leading passion of mankind, and it is most so with those who assume the character of candour, equanimity, and propriety. I hate the cold-hearted : I would prefer a man full of vices, if he mingles generous virtues with them.

And what is friendship but a name ?—

says Goldsmith in his “ Hermit.” These people will affect to condole with you ; but they will always condole so as to throw the blame upon you. The world is a masquerade, in which the devil appears in various disguises, but always mischievous ;—never so mischievous, however, as when he plays the religious hypocrite, or the fraudulent agent of the law.

The cunning worldling never speaks of the insults he receives ; he boasts, on the contrary,

how kind every one is to him. How many of these wretches I have seen, smooth in their words, but with gall and bitter poison in their hearts! I would cut off my tongue or my hand, before I would say or write what I did not feel. But nothing is more vexatious than to desire to be well spoken of: it puts us at the mercy of the malignant and the false. Let one do right as far as one can, and put all comments at defiance. This will not secure good words; but if we have them as little as in the other case, we shall have saved the price for them. What is the world's flattery worth?—Not the cost of a moment's painful step. We cannot secure esteem by deserving it. People will be thus encouraged to take advantage of the desire, for the purpose of pressing unreasonably upon us. Mankind,

Like women, born to be controll'd,
Stoop to the forward and the bold.

What harm can a bad man's foul breath do if one keeps aloof from it?

If respect and esteem were dependent on unassuming good sense, talent, and virtue, we ought to be careful to be humble, and anxious at every symptom of disapprobation. But one may with at least an equal chance of consideration go one's own way, and be bound by nothing where conscience does not interfere. An affected obsequiousness and base bending to the humours of

others will produce no selfish benefit. It may be said that this doctrine goes to make a bear-garden of the world, with every one following his own will: but it is better than disguise, hypocrisy, and mean cunning. We then have to encounter an open enemy, and know how to be guarded against him.

It may be that he who puts the world at defiance will be defied by the world: but what avails that? Their spite is defeated by the very act of defiance. Nothing damps genius like servility and a false humbleness. Attempt to conciliate, and you will only show your own weakness. Calumny and misrepresentation will follow every one, do what he will. The food of half mankind is malice and detraction. He who scorns the little tricks of the world, will get the ascendant over them.

As to coarseness and ferocity, they are contrary to my nature; but there are occasions on which one may be pardoned for being irritated into them. There is so much provocation, so much wrong, and so much insidiousness and treachery in life, that he who can be always calm under them must be of a nature unsusceptible of any noble emotion.

It is a duty to repel insult and expose injustice. it is a dastard heart which is patient under them. Every sort of arrogance ought to be punished and

crushed. With me, indignation is a ready and ruling passion: some call it morbidness, some fire, and some pride;—at any rate, they give it the name which they think most odious. Not to have been provoked by the opposition and plots which have pursued me through life, could only have taken place from a deadness of blood. But my blood has always been of a warm and flaming nature, rising into a blaze at a touch or a look: yet the superficial see nothing in my appearance but a deep and immoveable gloom.

I am grave at times, and cloudy in my countenance, but not gloomy. I am changeable in my humours, and in a moment pass from melancholy to joy, and from joy to melancholy. I have lived so long in storms and dangers, that where I was once fearful I am become bold. I repulse by my frowning visage, and discourage by my seeming insensibility.

But the manner in which I have been treated emancipates me from all forms, and I am not bound to keep terms with the world. Solitude is no terror to me; and so far, therefore, I am independent of the world's injuries. I keep my own hours; the little sleep I take is by day, and I toil through the long night at the lamp. Thus I work without interruption, in the repose of profound silence. Imagination supplies the want of those material objects which are veiled in the

mantle of darkness. It is the imagination which keeps the heart in a perpetual flow of energetic emotions.

The favourite effort of technical critics and dull moralists is to mislead the public as to the purposes and duties of imagination. This high faculty is the balm and light of life: without it there can be no noble thoughts or grand feelings. It supplies the materials of reason, and a far wider and deeper field of observation than experience. This is the power which enables us to enter into men's hearts and know the human character: what is called experience seldom shows us any thing more than the surface. From good poetry, properly written, the best moral lessons are to be drawn.

But a large portion of what is called poetry is, it must be confessed, useless and childish. It is essentially defective, because it is not an embodiment and exemplification of truth. I do not mean a particular truth which has actually occurred, but abstract truth. To this great design a poet should give his days and nights: there are inexhaustible subjects for such grave and instructive inventions.

A minor poet, however, deals in trifles which bring the art into disrepute. He has no invention, but merely attempts to supply the ornaments of a glittering dress. But the multitude are too apt to love these gewgaws and sweetmeats rather

than solid matter and substantial food, and the trickery of false poetry rather than the eloquence of true. If it is not buckramed, and gemmed, and harmonized into an insipid polish, it does not strike them.

Grand emotions arising from the grand images which imagination voluntarily presents, are the only genuine poetry. It is only from imaginative subjects blazing before the mind that sublime or pathetic poetry can be written. While objects are present,—not in idea, but in their material forms,—who can write? Memory will not effect this purpose, because it does not give the images, but only the types of them.

He who is truly possessed by the Muse always appears whimsical to vulgar and dull minds, because there are present to him shapes and voices which they cannot see or hear. His impulses seem to them without cause, and his hopes and fears but empty shadows: but he is almost always under the dominion of spirits.

There are few things of my life which I regret more than having suffered myself, by the ascendancy of bad criticism, to be restrained from entering at full liberty into the genuine paths of the Muse. Imagination should have been given her ample and unchecked range. In all her opening vistas, and glens, and solitudes, she should have “given to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.” She should have presented

the infinite varieties of the grandeur and beauty of creation, animate and inanimate, as in a mirror : not indeed as they appear to the outward senses, but to the *mind's eye* ; and to the *mind's eye* in a grave humour,—not in a state of fantastic wantonness. Such poetry never tires or satiates : it carries on the soul in a stream of delight, as the incense of the morning air breathes rapture on the senses.

The strain which does not hurry us forward by awakening instantaneous sympathy, is not the voice of the Muse : it is a false oracle, which speaks obscurities for want of inspiration. I persevere in the opinion that studied poetry is good for nothing.

When once that which constitutes the real charm of poetry is misunderstood, authors are driven to tricks to excite attention, which lead to all sorts of corruptness. It is of the essence of this art, or rather gift, to represent what is imagined, and not what is copied from particular instances in actual existence. To render the picture of reality more grand or beautiful, authors resort to false colours,—to exaggeration and glitter. This is the vice of modern poetry. Probability and chasteness are thus put at defiance ; and no reader of taste can long persevere to peruse those compositions without being wearied and palled.

There should be no attempt to overcolour na-

ture. Every thing should be drawn with a sacred regard to truth ; and nothing should be admitted which cannot carry with it our belief. Writers of very little genius can put together incongruous things, and thus excite notice by surprise. *Incredulus odi*. I abhor the cold efforts of mechanical art. Nothing which is not simple and touching, and does not awaken the unforced sympathies of the bosom, is good, valuable, and genuine. The simplest and easiest path is, in fact, the best ; but secondary authors cannot be brought to believe so.

Nature is always the same : fashion is always changing ; it is its essence to change. Therefore he who seeks to gratify the fashion must produce something different from nature. He is driven to affectations, overwrought tints, impossible or improbable combinations, and the exhibition of magnified objects. Shakspeare in his wildest imaginations never does this ; he never outsteps nature. To outstep nature shows an author's weakness and want of poetical power : it is like the little man who struts and stalks to make himself appear taller than he is.

But the false and dull critic, who loves forced stimulants, cries, " We have nature before our eyes ;—we want something more striking." We have nature before us, but not nature associated and embodied with intellectual and moral impressions and feelings. We require the aid of the

great poet to do this for us : and he must do this by the power of his invention,—by imagining events, characters, and scenery ; but he must imagine them, in every particular, after the course and manner of nature.

For these reasons my own taste never leads me to enjoy or approve those poems which represent temporary manners. But here a difficulty arises : it may be argued that my doctrine would exclude all poetry which is copied from observation. The materials may be drawn from observation, and used inventively,—not confined to the portraits of individuals. We come then to the pictures which one gives of himself, and of his own internal movements. How can these be poetical ? They are only so when those internal movements so described are full of imagination ; and then they have a verity which has some advantages over what is painted to exist in imaginary persons ; but altogether the chances are that the representation of the imaginary person will be more poetical. Gray, in his “Elegy,” writes in the character of an imaginary person. This gives the quality of invention to his poem ; for invention is not confined, as some suppose, to story, but equally embraces spiritual existence.

The Pleasures of Imagination, the Pleasures of Memory, and the Pleasures of Hope, cannot be accurately separated from each other : the last is a part of the first, and the second is closely inter-

mingled with it. They can only give novelty by varying their illustrations, and giving them in a *different style and form of verse*. *I do not think* that didactic poetry is the best suited to its powers; but it is the ore, not its form, which gives the charm. Truth, eternal and grand truth, is the object, in whatever form it be conveyed; but it must be truth exhibited, not by reasoning, but by the lamp of imagination.

It is universally admitted that there are no other compositions so wearisome, or so disgusting, as mediocre poetry; wearisome when it is weak and insipid,—disgusting when it is factitious and unnatural. Perhaps the latter should be excluded even from the mediocre, because it is no poetry at all. It is true that verses will sometimes excite for a time the attention of the vulgar, in proportion as they are bad, because the mob have always a gaping curiosity for wonders; but wonders, when they have been some time gazed at, cease to be wonders, and then the spell is vanished.

But did any one ever tire in reading the great poets? All our feelings and buried ideas instantly respond to them, like the strings of the Æolian harp to the breeze. They have a transparency and native fire which lights up all the slumbering and cloudy figures of our brains, and gives an instant glow to the currents which circle round the heart. But what is obscure and far-fetched,

as well as what is extravagant, will never operate in this way. It is a primary requisite to be lucid; it is another, in my apprehension, to be flowing and unstudied.

These discussions cannot be useless : wrong canons of criticism lead to the depression of genius and the exaltation of charlatanism. False composition is at once mischievous, and more difficult to execute than that which is true ; more difficult to those who have the genius to execute the true,—and they who have not the genius ought not to write. It is of no use to put tawdry words together, and create monsters by extravagant combinations ; nor is affected dreaminess and mysterious unintelligibility the strain of the real Muse. Inspiration speaks clearly, and is the oracle of truth. One forced note, one tint wrought beyond nature, destroys the spell of poetry.

Simplicity—and this is not inconsistent with richness and grandeur—is the characteristic of every great poet. If there be inspiration, and that inspiration be indulged, how can there be labour and studied language ? A great thought will bear up any language : what is great in itself does not require to be adorned. I believe that a poem of great thoughts, written without a single ornament, might be found deeply interesting, and even excellent. It is a slavish adoration of models which suppresses in the bud so many grand possibilities of genius. I would tear away the

veil from Nature, and show her in all the grandeur of her naked beauty.

Fools think that poetry consists in a flowery diction,—that it ought to be a garden of bright words, and similes, and metaphors. It is the reverse : it must have high thoughts and stern plain language. But it must not be historical ; history and poetry are opposites. It must not relate facts, but imaginations.

Grandeur is, of course, the first essence of poetry ; but there may be poetry which is only gentle and pretty, and this latter will endure ornament if it be not too gaudy and studied. These gentle strains, however, are rather sickly, except to the feeble-minded ; as we may instance in the already forgotten poems of Jerningham, and in too large a portion of Shenstone's " Elegies ;" and, according to my taste, in many parts of the favourite Goldsmith. Even Mason is not free from them, nor Beattie in his minor poems.

As not only invention, but the quality of what is invented, must be regarded, it is not wonderful that so few writers of poetry reach the standard. At least four-fifths of the great body of English poetry might be committed to the flames without much loss. I cannot help supposing that many of the authors I would so condemn, might have written better if they had not taken false models. Few are above the influence of fashion, and they yield to the momentary appetite of the multitude,

who commonly delight in false stimulants. It is, moreover, easier for secondary talents to work by artifice than by inspiration.

Matter-of-fact minds necessarily love best that which has least imagination and most of observance; but they who are much occupied in watching the frivolous varieties of the actual surface of life, have little genius. The imaginations of life are its only grand attractions; reality is always coarse and disappointing. For this reason, whatever is a copy of individual cases exactly as they are, is repulsive. A strict attention to the principles and probabilities of human nature is not the less indispensable.

There is sometimes a charm in words; but they are unstudied breathings from the fire of the imaginative power. They come of themselves, and cannot be combined by art or toil. Shakespeare has more of this charm than any other poet, as indeed he has more of every quality of the essences of poetry; but this he would not have had, with all his genius, if he had not followed his ideas as they rose.

Where poetry is not congenial to the sober hues of truth—where it is not deeply imbued with a plaintive morality, it cannot belong to the first order. It ought to be fitted to the gravest tones of the heart, in its most solemn and most meditative moments, when sorrow and experience have made us melancholy and wise.

*We see things in imagination coloured according to the passions which circumstances have provoked ; and these, when properly selected, are the elements of poetry. Without poetry, the highest movements of the mind would never have been described. No one therefore who does not love poetry can have an intellect of a high taste. They who call themselves philosophers may think otherwise, but in that case they will not be philosophers of the mind. We must look to poetry to furnish us with some of the most precious *data* for this philosophy.*

CHAPTER V.

Mankind set up models best suited to the taste of each—Anecdotes not always instructive—Self-importance—Every thing may be objected to—What do we require to know of others?—Use of private history—Autobiography—Friends may neglect to preserve memoirs of one—No one can see into the secrets of another's heart and head—The value in part depends on the importance of the person recorded—Authors may judge of their own compositions after an interval—Effects of vanity—Many know their own weakness—Popular authors insist on popularity as the test of merit—Literary merit may be precisely determined—Yet there are false judges—Many late publications of lives of authors—Their merits and defects—Burke, Burns, Byron—Others how far deficient—The visionary faculty—Lives of authors seldom full of action—Rousseau—Author does not endeavour to find apologies for autobiography—Monstrous invention a proof of want of genius—Johnson's test of excellence—Purposes answered by genius—Mortification of being a cipher—No lot contented—Qualities lamented as defects sometimes prove otherwise—Susceptibility of external senses not always accompanied by internal movements—Possession of high endowments not to be desired because unhappy—Genius entitled to mercy and candour as well as others—Talent not for self alone—False pretensions to genius common—Labour cannot supply want of genius—Disrelish of forced productions—Obscurity of far-fetched thoughts, and blaze of genius—Rarity of genius not to be accounted for—Mechanism will lead astray from true poetry—Wearisomeness of secondary poets—Only one good poet in "Mirror for Magistrates"—Lord Buckhurst—This a practical proof of the rarity of poetical genius.

It is a common failing of human nature to judge of others by a model and standard best suited

to ourselves. Yet a variety of models and standards is necessary for the affairs of the world. The more I think on autobiography, the more perilous I find it to define its limits, and keep within them: and the attempt to satisfy others is still more perilous. There is a demand for anecdote which few can supply;—while, however amusing, anecdotes too much multiplied are apt to be much more delusive than instructive. The memorialist is too apt to overvalue his own importance; and even where he does not his own just importance,—at least the importance, which envy, jealousy, and rivalry, are willing to concede to him—ingenuity may find some objection to the matter of which he makes use, whatever his choice may be. It may be called either too general, or too minute; too far-fetched, or too trite; too obscure, or too familiar; too ostentatious, or too mean; and, in short, the very opposite of all that is written may be per-versely demanded.

The only safe guide by which such an author can direct his course, is to ask himself what information he would wish in the life of another who has bent his ambition and labours to the same pursuits. We have many celebrated poets who have left no memorials of themselves, and of whose personal history little is otherwise known: we have no difficulty in fixing on many points regarding them, on which we wish to have

our curiosity gratified : we are entitled therefore to illustrate similar points regarding ourselves, and not think them impertinent or irrelevant.

Private history enables us to ascertain an author's sincerity ; and that is essential to the authority of his opinions. If one who writes sentimentally and gravely should turn out a man of mockery, who turns the world and its groups and scenes into a jest,—the charm of his serious compositions from that moment is gone. But can we trust one in the features and colours he gives to his own portrait ? Would a hunchback paint his own deformity ?

In spite of these difficulties, the best materials of biography are derived from self-written memoirs : for these always bear with them internal evidence of authenticity, or vain disguise, which cannot be mistaken. He who over-estimates himself, will in such memoirs continually betray his error ; and few readers will be so wanting in sagacity as not to detect him. Malevolent detraction may also try to misrepresent him, and it may succeed for a time, but truth will triumph at last.

Who can wisely trust to friendship to preserve the remembrance of him, when he is gone ? What a friend knows himself, he is apt to assume that every one knows ; and thus leaves the record unwritten, till all is faded from the memory. But if he were inclined to write, is he always a ju-

delicious friend, capable of performing his task well? Friends may see too near,—as others may see too distantly. And who by mere external observance can guess what is passing in another's bosom or brain? One passes comparatively but few of the hours of one's life in the sight of any friend. And do not even those most attached to us frequently mistake our motives, views, opinions, and feelings? Sarcasm will answer to this, "And if they do mistake, what does it signify?"

But if a memorial be justifiable, it ought to be a true memorial. Its value to the public, when true, must depend on the worth and talent of the person memorialized. To have been the author of a book is not a sufficient pretension without reference to the quality of the book. It is said that no one can be a proper judge of his own writings. I do not accede to this opinion. I think that many authors are quite as accurate judges in this respect as other critics. If they are sometimes partial, they are free from the contrary passion,—they desire to find fault, which is not less misleading.

Perhaps no one is a fair judge of his own composition immediately after he has finished it, and before the heat in which it was written has subsided: but after an interval, when he has been conversant with other subjects and the works of others, he can pronounce with as fair a probability of accuracy, as on the productions of other

writers who have similar tastes and indulge similar associations.

He who knows his own weakness, is inexcusable if any vanity induces him to put himself forward as strong; and many do know it, though others may delude themselves. But he who suffers himself to be cast down by false criticism and malignant cavil deserves the fate to which he is subjected. An unmerited fame is allowed to some; an unmerited depreciation falls on others: but whatever be the fame, intrinsic worth is capable of supporting itself, if it has fortitude. And if there be intrinsic worth, the register of its opinions, and the events of its life, must be instructive.

There may be the desire of fame without the qualities to acquire it; and this passion may begin early and continue late; but it does not do so. Where it is a deceitful inebriation, it generally evaporates after some experience. Very few will struggle on after repeated failures: failure and non-acquirement of fame are not the same thing. The enemy in the one case is active—in the other, passive: where he does not dare attack, he attempts to smother by slight. But in almost all genius there is a fire, which, though it sleeps sometimes, never dies.

Authors who have been popular hold out that popularity is the sole test of merit: they there-

fore deny that Milton was neglected in his lifetime. But what fact is more clear? Fame commences by accident or management: it will not endure but through positive desert. If fame is not the certain proof of merit, censure and abuse are as little the certain proofs of demerit: we must determine by admitted principles the intrinsic qualities of the aspirant. Whether one is a poet of true genius, can be decided beyond rational controversy.

Notwithstanding this, however, they who take upon themselves to adjudge often do dispute, and deny in despite of all proof: but these judgments are only in force for a little while. There are men who live by corrupt judgments, and are paid for them. It would be miserable if there were no fame but such as was the result of caprice or evil motives.

During the last thirty or forty years a great many single lives have been published of English authors, such as Cowper, Beattie, Burns, Sir William Jones, Lord Kames, Gibbon, Cumberland, the Wartons, Hayley, Sheridan, Burke, Byron, Robertson, John Home, Chatterton, Kirke White, Dr. Parr, Goldsmith, Smollett, Leyden, &c. These furnish a vast fund of intellectual and moral information. But many of them want profundity of disquisition, and the disclosure of those secrets of the mind and heart which we most wish

to know. Letters are useful; but a narrative made up of a string of letters is but a bungling sort of biography.

The greatest names in this list are Burke, Burns, and Byron; an opinion which will scarcely be controverted. Of some of the others the very eminent pretensions may be called into doubt. In the greater part of them a rich and bold invention is not displayed,—at least in a high degree. Was it that they had it not, or that they were restrained by cold models from putting it forth? I doubt if they had it in the full extent requisite. It seems to me that where it exists, it will find its way out. But if it did not exist in those, in whom did it exist? Did it exist in those who never came forward at all? In whom it was as the gems buried “in the deep unfathomed ocean?” Or is it a power bestowed only with such excessive rarity?

I suspect that the visionary faculty is very common; but that the rarity lies in the power of embodying in language what it presents. Rare as it is, does it always secure applause when it appears? Perhaps not. The multitude applaud only that to which they are accustomed, and which they are taught to admire: they often like what they do not praise, and praise what they do not like. Still the principles of poetical invention are definite, and the execution can be mea-

sured with much precision. It cannot fail to be distinguished what part of a composition is invention, nor whether it be probable, and grand, or pathetic, or beautiful, or comic. If it combine probability with one of these qualities, it must have merit, and deserve the name of genius.

But it will be said that the life of an eminent author may afford few materials for biography. Certainly not, if it be confined to facts: for a meditative person often passes his existence without any bodily adventure or activity; but his mind is never idle or unexploring. And here comes the advantage of autobiography; for who can tell perfectly another's secret thoughts and feelings? To a common eye, and in outward appearance, a rich genius does not differ from a dull, uninformed creature. It is of little interest to be told those vulgar events, which may equally befall the gifted and the ungifted.

Could any one have had a full idea of Rousseau's character from what might have been related by any other biographer than himself? An impartial stranger may tell some things which an author cannot, or will not tell of himself. Gray could have told us many things of himself, which the most intimate friend could not tell: but he was too fastidious and morbid to be frank. How much one would have wished an autobiography

from the two Wartons, who knew so much of the literary history of their own, as well as of former times!

It will seem by these observations as if I was endeavouring to find an apology for these memorials: and some will cry out, that in doing so I have the presumption to put myself in association with great names; and that if even this could be forgiven, I have brought forward none of the curious confessions on which I have founded the defence of autobiography. I cannot be sure of the value of the matter I have produced. I have endeavoured to lay open my mind with frankness, as well as with deep self-examination: if I have failed, I must endure the consequence; but I shall not repent of the trial. I shall have said enough to afford ample materials for a just judgment of me. If I am weak, I cannot fail to have betrayed my weakness in such an extent of pages of original matter, and in the delivery of such a multitude of opinions and sentiments.

To those who deem monstrous inventions, and wild and improbable extravagancés, the proofs of poetical genius, I have nothing to say. I consider them to be evidences of the direct reverse; and that they who think so can have neither talent, taste, feeling, nor judgment. If they mistake, — as they constantly do, — what is the nature of imagination, it is vain to argue with them.

I am not ignorant how they are led into these errors. It is easier for these inapprehensive intellects to estimate what is mechanical and measured by artificial rules, than what is natural and produced by the inspiration of inborn genius. Joinery, and especially joinery of violent contrasts, is striking even to the dim and purblind eye.

Nature, force, and novelty, are the three qualities which Johnson justly puts forth as tests of excellence; but to make poetry, these must be presented through the vehicle of imagination: the most difficult of all, perhaps, is novelty. There may be originality without novelty; because that is original, which is drawn from the sources of an author's own mind,—even though the same thing has been said before. It is very rare that what is true has not been anticipated by some other mind. But though it may not be new, it must not be trite,—nor must the subject be unimportant.

A gifted spirit goes forth into the world, not merely to hold a mirror to it, but to throw a light upon it. Every one is not formed to read the inscriptions which are written, however clearly, on all the objects of creation. It requires some ardour of unearthly ambition to hope to do so, and to aspire to the energy of the high task:—the occasions are various on which these elucidations may be brought forward; and, among the rest, auto-

biography gives some opportunities of a peculiar kind.

To consider oneself born into the world as one of tens of millions of undistinguished beings, causes a rather depressive feeling. But the glory of obtaining notice is in proportion to the number of contenders. Were one to calculate nicely at the commencement, few minds would be bold enough to enter the lists. But it is very doubtful whether distinction, when attained, gives the enjoyment we anticipate, or any portion of it. They who, with a calm self-complacence,

Pursue the noiseless tenor of their way,

are more likely to be happy. But, alas! there is no content in any lot or condition of human life. And who does not look back with regret to much of the course he has trod? I mourn with deep melancholy for the years I have lost in idleness,—seeing what might have been done by daily and unbroken industry. Yet, compared with many, I have not been idle. Perhaps, however, the mind requires some recreation, and uninterrupted labour may deaden it.

I have found that many of the qualities in my nature, or circumstances in my fate,—which, as a boy and long afterwards, I lamented as defects or obstructions,—have been the means by which I have been carried on through this troublesome

warfare of life: that when I was morbid, and shy, and agitated, where others were calm, I was nursing energies which have supported me in misfortune, and strengthened me for toil. Had I had the self-possession of my companions, I should have been unimpressible by those high susceptibilities which have been the charm of my existence. When the force with which objects pressed upon my outward senses, and the keenness of the internal perception which followed them, kept me in a state of painful perturbation, I thought it was an imperfect organization which made me look upon others, with whom I compared myself as my superiors. Yet to this very organization do I owe whatever notice, or whatever pleasure, I have experienced in life.

Whether the external senses may be sometimes highly susceptible without a proportionate internal or intellectual movement or capacity, I cannot venture to pronounce; but it seems to me that they may: yet, without the combination, they will produce a mere material and individual effect. The senses may be exquisitely fine, yet the understanding may be weak, or at any rate not proportionally sensitive; or the heart may be less capable of congenial emotions;—all must concur to make eminent poetical genius. The failure of the last is not infrequent where the others co-operate perfectly. The result is, then, a false

pathos, where glitter is substituted for passion. Art and talent can never produce any substitute for the sensibility of the affections.

But this sort of conjunction of outward and inward impressibility is often capricious ; and it is this which gives a moodiness and uncertainty to genius, that makes superficial observers call its sincerity in question. It is often overcome where *others do not see the cause* ; and sometimes stands unmoved, where others observe subjects for strong feeling. In these cases there are powerful counteracting movements within, not perceptible by others. Genius must feel at its own time and place, and when all its various faculties coalesce.

These gifts may not make the possessor happy ; but that is no reason for a denial of their existence. Providence knows its own purposes, and gives them at its own will. But no doubt it allows to the gifted the option how to use the dispensation. If they abuse it, they must abide the consequences : the gift may not be less apparent, though less praiseworthy.

Why is genius alone, of all orders of men, to be treated without mercy ? why are high deserts to be made a pretence for exacting every sort of merit ? and why is a defect of any to deprive them of the candour which is extended to those who have no sort of merit ? It seems as if the censors said, " Having so many shining qualities,

we cannot forgive you, if you are deficient in any virtue or power." It is true, that if brilliant abilities are used habitually to throw false lights before the world for the purpose of misleading it, such wickedness ought not to be excused or forgiven. But occasional aberrations may be looked upon with candour and mercy.

It is assumed by the narrow and mean-minded that a man's talents are given him merely for the direction of his own individual conduct, and his own selfish interests,—mistaking into the bargain craft for wisdom. Now all great talents are given as lamps to others: and we must examine them with reference to the public,—not to the possessor's private concerns. He whose mind is absorbed by the public may overlook the petty interests which regard himself. What is called good sense is commonly nothing more than a sense turned to mean and petty objects. He whose mind is occupied with little things, can never extend it to great ones.

That there is in the world a great deal of false pretension to genius, every one must be aware; and that the false often gains more temporary encouragement than the true. When an author dresses up old and often trite thoughts with tawdry ornaments, on which he imposes the name of imagination and invention, I call it false pretension to genius: I say that a man of talent, art, and labour, may do this without genius; and

that it will never produce the charm which is given by genius; that is a sort of indefinable charm,—a spirit which breathes we know not how or whence. A main distinction of it is the absence of artifice. It comes direct from the fountain of the internal inborn spirit; it does not concern itself with illustrations, but with original thoughts and emotions; it relates its visions and waking dreams; it communicates what it experiences and believes; and thus, by its freedom from affectation, awakens the instantaneous sympathy of others. They who have nothing within them to be awakened, may prefer exaggerated images, and strong colouring, and varnish, which they may call splendour.

I have little relish for these forced productions, and it appears to me that they are but vain and empty toils. I know not what they teach, unless that much labour may be spent to produce useless ornament. To open the recesses of the mind and the heart, is to open a book of inestimable curiosity. But what do we gain by pictures of fanciful or fantastic similitude? and how is the sober imagination gratified by pictures which it knows to be artificial and impossible? Was this the way by which Homer or Virgil delighted us? Is this the spell of Shakspeare or any great dramatic poet?

They who are far-fetched in their thoughts, are apt to be obscure, and to wander from the truth.

Light flashes upon genius, and it lives in a blaze and a flame. It throws an atmosphere of warmth around it, which imparts itself to those who come within its reach. It is always desirable to discourage charlatanism and pseudo-magic, and withdraw the tinsel robe from the gewgaw efforts of would-be wits. The native imagination sees the created globe and all its grandeurs and beauties, with the skies that surround it, not in artificial dresses, but in all their simple nakedness.

How is it then that there is so little pure and genuine poetry? This is a serious wonder with me, which all my meditations will not enable me adequately to account for. Fashion and bad models go some way towards it: but there are good models also;—why have not these been followed? Is it the extreme rarity of powerful and right genius? I can scarcely think that the gift is so rare, though the bringing its fruits to maturity is so uncommon.

So long as poetry is treated as a production, which may be brought forth by rule and mechanical art, it will in every age depart from its true course, character, and tone. No pains or skill can supply the proper thoughts of poetry, except by borrowing; and what is borrowed is faint and worthless. It is for this reason that what is unnatural, and therefore unpoetical, is resorted to.

I know not how it is, but when we take up

the works of secondary poets, though they appear the same as their superiors in outward form to the eye and ear, there is a deadness in them which makes us soon lay them down again. Look how striking this distinction is between Lord Buckhurst's article and all the rest in the "Mirror for Magistrates!" Wherever *materiam superat opus*, there can be no real charm. But the difference is in the glow on one side;—the cold, heavy labour on the other: a sort of creeping obstructed drop by drop, which do not run into one another, instead of an impetuous and unbroken current. This is so, because it is extorted from a barren and dry brain, which draws its borrowed stream with difficulty from distant sources. It cannot be accounted for from the imperfect state of the language, for the language was sufficient to serve Spenser and Shakspeare; and where will a greater vigour and flow be found than in these great poets?

The "Mirror for Magistrates" is, indeed, a practical proof of the rarity of the poetical power, which can scarcely be disputed. Here are numerous writers, all aspirants to the laurel, and many of them of some reputation; yet, with all their endeavours, not one, except Buckhurst, succeeds. The subjects, too, afforded ample room for good poetry; and it is strange how they could have missed it!

CHAPTER VI.

Death of Mr. Barrett of Lee—Short account of his family—His father—His own character—Wyatt's alterations of the house at Lee—Sir Paul Barrett—Sir George Ent—Sir Richard Head—The author's eldest son—Facts—Abstract speculations—Study of the human mind—Acquired knowledge—Method and labour—Imagination and sentiment—The heart—Difference between an illustrative and originating imagination—Burke—Coldness of secondary poets—Accusation that unchecked opinions are crude and erroneous—Natural eloquence—Incidents to genius—Advice—Shakspeare and Pope—Johnson—Power of imagination and reason compared—Matter-of-fact philosophers—Similes and metaphors—An invisible world—Necessity of knowing the mental qualities proper to be nursed—Genius put into jeopardy by envy and malice—Johnson's detractor of Gray—Influence of Johnson's "Lives"—His piquancy—Power of generalization—Vagueness—Discrimination—Exaggeration, praise, and high-flown admiration—An unmeaning flourish of Pope.

THOMAS BARRETT, Esq. of Lee Priory, near Canterbury, maternal uncle to the mother of my eldest son, died in January, 1803, aged fifty-nine, and left his estates and name to this son, then in his minority, being only in his fourteenth year. Mr. Barrett was the great-grandson of Sir Paul Barrett of Lee, serjeant-at-law, recorder of Canterbury, and M.P. for New Romney, in the reign of Charles II. His father, Thomas Barrett, Esq.

of the same place, died in 1758, and was of *virtù*, eminent for his taste in the arts, and made a good collection of paintings, books, and antiquities. He had a large fortune, and lived in a very handsome manner. He married four times—all heiresses. His first wife was a daughter of Sir William Boys, a physician of Canterbury, of the ancient family of Boys, who was his first-cousin ; his second the sole heir of Dr. Peter Delapierre, or Peters, of the Black Friars, Canterbury, whose family came from Gorne in Flanders in the time of Charles I., and had an act of parliament to naturalize them ; his third, the only child of Hercules Baker, Esq. M.P., and treasurer of Greenwich Hospital ; his fourth, the heir of Captain Pudan of the navy, by the co-heir of Sir Richard Willys, Bart. Mr. Barrett was the only child of the last wife. His sister was by the second wife : she married the Rev. William Digwas Byrche,* who died in March, 1792, aged sixty-two, and died herself in July, 1798, aged seventy. She inherited her mother's fortune.

* Mr. Byrche was in all respects an amiable and excellent man. He was a divine, a classical scholar, and a man of science. He had a strict conscience, deep piety, active charity, and a mild amiable temper. His manners were gentle, and his habits of life innocent and simple. He loved literature, and cultivated it to the last. He passed through life with untainted virtue, and died suddenly without a struggle at his house in the Black Friars, Canterbury, where his wife's ancestors, the Delapierres, had resided from the time of Charles I.

Mr. Barrett was, like his father, highly accomplished in the arts, and devoted to them. He new-modelled his seat at Lee, after the designs of Mr. James Wyatt, in the Gothic form, at a vast expense; and this seat was thence generally allowed to be one of the most beautiful specimens of Wyatt's architectural genius, and was so held by Lord Orford.* Lee is situated in the parish of Ickham, about four miles from Canterbury, on the verge of the great turnpike-road to Sandwich and Deal. Mr. Barrett lived very handsomely, and prided himself on his regard to etiquette and outward appearance. His manners were polished, perhaps a little finical; and he had something of the fastidiousness of Lord Orford and Gray, with both of whom he was intimate. One of his most intimate friends through life was the Rev. Norton Nicolls, Gray's correspondent—a very clever man, with a great deal of erudition;† but, it must be confessed, a supreme coxcomb. Mr. Barrett was quick and accomplished, with an exact and minute memory; but had not the stronger capacities of the mind. He was, however, in all respects a good and amiable man, of high honour and integrity, who discharged every duty of life without a stain, and prided himself upon correctness in all

* See a note to Walpole's "Anecdotes of Painting," edition about 1786; and see Hasted's "History of Kent."

† See Mathias's character of him in J. Nichols's "Anecdotes."

his conduct. He sat in parliament a few months for Dover, in 1773, after a severe and expensive contest with Mr. Trevanion, on the death of Sir Thomas Hales.

Sir Paul Barrett's last wife and widow was the daughter and heir of the celebrated physician Sir George Ent, the pupil and biographer of Dr. William Harvey, who discovered the circulation of the blood. She had been previously married to Mr. Head, who died before his father Sir Richard Head, the first baronet of that family, and by him was mother of Sir Francis Head, whose daughter was my maternal grandmother; so that there was an alliance between the families of Barrett and Brydges previous to my first marriage in January, 1786. My eldest son, on coming of age, took the name of Barrett by sign-manual; and in 1826 succeeded to a company, with the rank of lieutenant-colonel, in the Grenadier Guards. He was born in June, 1789.

I do not undertake to say that these are facts important to the illustration of the life of a literary man; but some facts the public will have, for I am well aware that they will not be content with nothing but abstract speculations, to which for my own part I am much more inclined. To me the delightful study is the mind in all its faculties, varieties, and movements, and to determine what faculties are the best, and how to manage them.

These are very nice and subtle inquiries, and on which the common opinions seem to me at great variance with the truth.

It is a prevailing supposition that he who has the most acquired knowledge is the most powerful intellectualist. Now acquired knowledge, laid upon springs which are not sufficient to bear it up, is an evil. Talent, if not genius, is required to turn it to account. It is a favourite doctrine, however, that method and labour may do all. Let us look at men formed by the advantage of official technicalities. Whenever they come to the trial, whenever the road is not beat out for them, they fail. Then knowledge incumbers and misleads them, because they do not know how to apply it.

I have never yet read a psychological treatise which has entirely satisfied me; and in connexion with it, and for the same reasons, no disquisition on poetry has entirely come up to my ideas. Essentials are taken as secondaries, and secondaries as essentials. Too much stress is always laid upon art. And that indefinable charm, which results from the breath of inspired and unprompted genius, is less regarded than one could suppose possible. The very easy and unstudied flow, which is its delight, is taken to be want of mastery. The imagination is an independent power which will not obey any command; her operations

must be voluntary. Yet for this very reason, and because they are natural, many deem them to have less merit.

Sometimes imagination and sentiment are bestowed without any great degree of the ratiocinative faculty. They may still produce beautiful creations, but not of the very grandest order. The reason is wanted to judge and give a depth of thought.

There is an imagination which cannot originate, but can only add. These are fitted to write historical poems and romances. There is nothing of origination in common prose-fictions or novels; they are a mere jumble, and shifted combination of common facts and common characters, or they are a copy of vulgar gossip, vulgar dialogues, and vulgar manners.

A pure and unmixed imagination is so rare that it is difficult to name an instance of it. Almost all Shakspeare's stories and plots, and many of his characters, were borrowed; but still he gave to them a life and spirit of his own; so that what he did could scarcely be called mere additions. Indeed he stands by himself in every thing, putting at defiance all rules and all speculations.

The heart is a safe test by which the productions of the mind that address the imagination may be tried, and by which all the morality of the head may also be tried. If the heart does not acknowledge and respond to them, I shall be unwilling to admit their propriety. The human

heart always echoes back the voice of truth. If the heart does not respond, the head will not believe; and without the power to impose belief, of what interest are the fictions of imagination?

Persons of poetical power, and persons of poetical temperament, even without the power, live upon imagination. Without the aid of imagination, existence would be insufferably insipid to them. It is this power which gives all the tints and all the charms. Tear it away, and the spell which invests things is gone; all is then hard, and ugly, and repulsive. It is through this spell that every rural sight and sound makes our bosoms vibrate with pleasure. Hence female beauty enraptures, and all our senses awaken internal commotion. It gives us what abundant wealth and worldly prosperity cannot give, and all material blessings cannot supply.

But, as the imaginative faculties are of different classes, this spell does not operate equally in all. I am not sure what its effect may be on a mere illustrative rather than an originating imagination. This also may be said to invest objects with ideal splendour; but as it is a companion, rather than an identity, it cannot have the same effect. It may more address the understanding, but not equally bewitch the fancy. But the surprising thing is, that many think this sort of imagination more brilliant than the other, and the proof of a greater genius. This perhaps may be because they mis-

take the dress for the form which it invests. This is the sort of imagination which makes authors witty, rhetorical, or metaphysical poets. This adorns Burke's oratory beyond all others; but I cannot doubt that, if he had applied his mind to original creation he could have accomplished that also.

There is in the greater part of secondary poets a coldness, which must have arisen from an artificial imagination. What is done by technical labour can have no life. He who is occupied to polish syllables, and harmonize sentences, and to search likenesses in dissimilitudes, must have the *sang froid* of dulness itself.

Others may hold contrary doctrines—that unchecked opinions and first impressions are always crude and often erroneous, and that the best artist is the greatest genius.

Natural eloquence rarely grows obsolete: what was written unaffectedly two hundred years ago, very little differs from modern language.

These are positions important to be ascertained or refuted, because both the conduct of authors and judgment of readers depend upon them. Persons of the quality of mind which I call genius will never submit to discipline, toil, and restraint; and, if these are required of them, they will not write at all. But he who resolves to write must listen to no one's advice—he must go on in

his own way. Advice is rarely sincere ; and if sincere, never judicious. Whether flattery or censure, it generally arises from unfair motives. But, if general principles and just distinctions be clearly established, the effect of wrong criticisms will be much more easily counteracted, and the capriciousness of wilful opinion robbed of its sting. If my theory on these subjects is wrong, Shakspeare must be degraded from his supremacy, and Pope must stand at the head of all English poets.

That Johnson, with all his acuteness and force of talent, has done more harm than good to our national poetry cannot, I think, be doubted. The predominant result of all his doctrines is this—that the school of Dryden and Pope is the best. He has admirably described the characteristics of that school, and conferred upon them all the praise that his powerful language could give ; but I do not admit that he has made out the pre-eminence which he wished to demonstrate. Before I can admit that, I must admit that observation is better than invention, and ratiocination than sentiment. If it could be proved that the imaginative faculty is of a lower grade than reason, and less conducive to the discovery of truth, then Johnson's poetical canons would be unanswerable.

I contend, however, that the reverse is correct, and that a sound imagination can picture out our

mingled being of spirituality and materialism much better than reason. Reason takes microscopic views of things, and cannot at once have before it expansive prospects.

The imagination weaves a web of her own; she weaves with materials taken—partly at least—from the world around her; but the web must be of one piece, not patchwork forcibly sewed together.

The frozen brain of the matter-of-fact philosopher will argue that a poet's visions are but the shadows of things shaped after his own whim; and that they are but an empty delusion producing false enchantments. But this can only be said of poetry which is not genuine: if they do not pay a strict regard to verisimilitude, they are not poetry. The mischievous principle is, that the poet is to tell nothing of which the eyes, ears, and hands have not cognisance. This damps all inspiration, and strikes at the essence of poetry.

If the idea to be conveyed is not poetry, the dress or ornament of language cannot make it so: and what consecutive series of invention can there be in similes and metaphors? Therefore they distract the mind, and leave it bewildered by unconnected flashes. The poetry of diction, where there is poverty of thought, is a meretriciousness which soon loathes. He who uses artificial tricks is not a magician but an impostor.

In addition to the material world, there is an invisible world around us; and it is the poet's business to bring this out, which he can only do by the force of imagination. But with this gift few are endowed in a sufficient degree of brightness—their mental sight is not strong enough to endure the dazzle. If few are qualified, they who are qualified ought to be encouraged and cheered. As to writing verses, that is a very easy task, if it be not necessary to put a poetical spirit into them.

In discussing the characters of those destined to take a lead among mankind, these investigations cannot be useless. Till we know precisely the qualities and faculties proper to be nursed, how can we judge how to manage our own minds, or how to stimulate those of others? Of how many children is the genius suppressed by checking what ought to be prompted, and prompting what ought to be checked! If there be the poetical faculty and temperament, it must be allowed to take its course, otherwise it will turn to poison.

But envy, jealousy, and the other malignant passions which have dominion over mankind, combined with conceited ignorance, put the bloom of genius into perpetual jeopardy. Sometimes it will work its own way in spite of them all; but it often perishes by crosses and injuries. The symptoms of deep intellectual capacity do not

show themselves to common observers; while the mind is working in silence, and preparing itself for future efforts; the gravity is mistaken by many for inactivity and dulness—while light heads reflect easily what is only received upon the surface.

Boldness is a quality with which genius is not always endowed; it yields to frowns, and is paralysed by objections. It is often of too delicate and morbid a nature to support rudeness, and droops and sinks before the blast or the shower. It invites insult by its susceptibility, and provokes attack by the mortification it inflicts on incapacity. But its worst enemies are some of its own tribe, stirred on by the direful passions of envy and detraction.

Thus Johnson said, that “Gray’s Poems were the productions of the hotbed—which yet were but cucumbers after all!”—and thus he speaks of the divine “Odes” of Collins as failures, even while he records with fondness his personal friendship, and speaks of his amiableness, his talents, and his learning, with the warmest admiration. So he treats Lyttelton and Shenstone with a coarse contempt, generated by the clouds of an evil temper. Whether he bent his rules of criticism to his own passions and desires, or whether his erroneous opinions arose from mental blindness, his authority on these topics is equally invalid.

Perhaps no work has had so much influence on the literary opinions of my time as Johnson's "Lives of the Poets," and none therefore more imperiously demands comment. To have retained so much notice and influence is a proof of great power; yet that power will not always bear analysis. His humour is always coarse, and his style is often heavy. His pomp is less conspicuous than in some of his former writings, but still it abounds. When he attempts to be familiar, it is commonly the familiarity of a pedagogue. He has no sentiment or feeling, and little imagery. Its whole spirit is not to exalt but to degrade—not to make the heart glow with admiration, but to bring the high to a level with the low. He seems to write with a view to gratify the mean passions of the mob, by instilling the *nil admirari*.

I suspect that one of the great holds upon the public has been the piquancy of his criticisms. The bitter is more pleasant to the multitude than the sweet; and when others are pulled down the obscure think themselves exalted. It is a sort of literary radicalism, which catches the appetites of the mass of the people. When Johnson, as a giant, despised mediocrity, the pigmies thought themselves lifted on his shoulders. But—to show the inconsistencies of the human mind—Johnson had a servile obsequiousness to political rank and wealth. His piety forced him to express admiration of Milton's great poem; but he exerted all his

strength, all his ingenuity, and all his heavy and clumsy wit, to degrade the man. His criticism on "Paradise Lost" is powerful and discriminative, but it is not equal to Addison's.

To generalise shows a great power of mind; but Johnson's generalisation often extends to vagueness. In this there is sometimes a delusive sort of ingenuity, in which there is more of show than of instruction and deep thought. "The Ramblers" are full of this; and stale truisms are often dressed in a pompous rotundity of words, which are mistaken for the oracles of original wisdom. They form a strong contrast to the simple style of Cowper, who is full of observation and precision of ideas. Compare them also with the style of Gray's "Letters"—who, when he carelessly describes the scenery of nature, gives distinctly in a few brief touches every leading feature.

There is a great deal of this vagueness in the "Tour to the Hebrides;" but there it sometimes produces grandeur and sublimity. If Johnson's mind had been incapable of producing precise ideas, this vagueness would detract from the fame of his intellectual superiority: but it was the contrary: no one could discriminate with more acuteness and more originality. He could at once separate the true from the false, and unravel the most complex ideas. In the description of material objects his power might be less, because his

sight was imperfect, and his sensibility to the beauties of nature obtuse. It was in intellectual distinctions that he was pre-eminently strong and ready. But it was in later life that these powers grew and improved upon him, as he was thrown more into society, and was stimulated by the collisions of conversation. He had, when unexcited, a morbid indolence and stagnant gloom.

In answer to these censures of Johnson's "Lives," I am aware that many will be ready to object that nothing is more fulsome than exaggerated praise and high-flown admiration. But why go from one extreme to another? I do not oppose severe criticism where it is just; but I oppose uncandid severity grounded on false principles. Why withhold praise where it is deserved? Even some small over-measure is an error on the generous side. The world are enough inclined to decry:—intellectual eminence wants some cheers and some shield. There is a favourite couplet of Pope on every one's lips:

A wit's a feather, and a chief a rod,—
An honest man's the noblest work of God!

It is one of those unmeaning flourishes thrown out *ad captandam vulgus*. An honest man, unless he be intellectual, is not only not the noblest, but not even a noble work of God. And why should a wit or a chief be less honest than a meaner-minded or meaner-conditioned man?

CHAPTER VII.

Author's pursuit of French and Italian bibliography—New ideas from a fixed residence on the Continent—English herd too much with each other abroad—Pride of the English—This offends other nations—Mere change of scenery soon loses its effect—Outward differences soon disappear from notice—National characteristics—An independent mind fitted for all countries—Distinction between love of country and bigotry—Inconveniences of a distance from England—Removal from English literature—Present time abused, but not unfavourable to literature—Forgetfulness of friends—Difficulty of detaching one's affections from one's native spot—Hasty travellers—Mont-Blanc and Vesuvius—The value of power of thinking—Powers enlarge as the field of observation enlarges—Author's "Recollections of Foreign Travel"—His poem of "The Lake of Geneva"—Occupations at Paris—"Stemmata Illustria"—"Anglo-Genevan Journal"—Idleness intolerable to the author—His health and dangerous illnesses—His walks—His seclusion—Regrets at misapplication of time—Self-knowledge—Submission to blights—Qualities calculated for success—Ridicule—No one can please all—Johnson's detracting spirit—Gray—Anecdote of Gray and Johnson—Geniuses need not jostle each other—Unequal distributions of Providence—Genius ought to come forth—The author fell on unpropitious times—Native powers have a decisive bent—Some deny talents where there is a want of practical prudence—Craft and disguise reprobated—Wickedness not finally successful—Talents not calculated for show—Author's irritability and frankness—A man of business—We cannot command among whom our lot shall fall—There is wickedness and fraud from which no prudence can escape—Author's ill-luck in this respect—The detail of private affairs must not be indulged—Necessity of firmness—Success, a proof of merit with the world.

At one time I amused myself with French literature, and at another with Italian, and made my-

self tolerably acquainted with the bibliography of each country, as I had formerly done of English—but I have given over all those things now ; and, as my memory is very fugitive, I remember but little about them. Innumerable trains of new ideas have of course passed my mind during the twelve or thirteen years I have lived upon the Continent. It will be strange indeed if it has produced no enlargement of mind and novelty of observation. Habits and manners to which one was wedded, have given way ; and local prejudices, which darken the opinions, have been entirely obliterated.

It is the fault of the English, however, when they come abroad, still to live too much with one another. As islanders, it is long before we entirely abandon our strong peculiarities, and our conceit of the exclusive superiority of all our own modes and customs and ideas. The English are only esteemed proud by other nations, but really are so. The consequence is, that though they are feared, they are little loved by them. At first the mere change of scenery pleases the English traveller ; but when the freshness goes off he tires, till a second habit, if he stays long enough, reconciles him.

These little differences of appearance and etiquette which strike at first, soon cease to attract notice ; and I have been accustomed to see individuals of so many nations congregated, that they

no longer excite my attention. There are, no doubt, moral and natural characteristics, mental and bodily, which belong to every country. For instance, the Italians have certainly more poetical imagination than the French; and the French more *esprit* than the Italians. They have moral differences equally marked. The Swiss are distinct from both, and have less imagination or sentiment than either. They have more *sang froid*, and perhaps more laboriousness. They love the sciences rather than the belles-lettres, and are accurate in matters of fact. I believe the Cantons differ from one another. The upper Cantons are, indeed, half German. The Genevans are a mixed race of French, Germans, Italians, &c., and even some small infusion of English, Scotch, and Irish; but notwithstanding the settlement of the English refugees, when they fled from the restoration of popery by Queen Mary, I find no English name here; nor any family confessedly descended from a male English stock.

A man of an independent mind, who frees himself from little passions, and has a competence to support him, can live in any country where the climate is good; and, in flying from one's native soil, one flies from many pangs of torn affections and broken friendships. The thoughts thus expatiate like the wings of a caged bird when turned into the free air. In one sense it is good to be a citizen of the world, though not to have lost all

patriotism. Between love of country and bigotry to it, there is a clear interval. For instance, the laws of England have not the superiority we attribute to them. If in a great part the principle is good, the machinery is complex and corrupt, and the expense not only destructive of the ends of justice but ruinous. The judges are able, skilful, and honest; but the lower classes of practitioners the very worst and most heartless members of society. The acuteness and manliness of the Bar is excellent, and calculated to keep the Bench in order, were they willing to stray.

With regard to political opinions and political constitutions, all the chief countries of Europe are now in such communication, that on these topics intelligent minds are every where approaching to each other. No one defends despotism in the abstract; and every one advocates liberty in the abstract, though he may differ from another about the means. But it would be quite impossible to enter here into the wide ocean of general politics.

One of the evils to me of a distance from England has been the inconvenient removal from its literature of the day, in which I always took an intense interest. I cannot immediately get at modern publications; and not at all, but at an enormous expense.

It is man's nature always to complain of the present time; but I do not believe that more

amusing and instructive books have ever been published than in the last few years. There are also many superficial, charlatanic, and corrupt ones; but so there have always been. Then the improvement in the art of printing and engraving, and in the embellishment of books, produces a splendour which was never exhibited before.

If poetry is out of fashion, it is a popular whim which will veer round again. There is no reason for it: though Byron and Scott are dead, there are several living writers with great poetical power.

But a separation from domestic literature is but one of many serious deprivations in a long absence from one's country. There are other melancholy considerations attending it. Who can pronounce without deep sighs the celebrated line—

Oblitusque meorum, obliviscendus et illis?

There are a few in whose hearts impressions are profound, and not easily rooted up; but this is not the case with the mass of mankind. They are light and airy; and figures cast upon them are like the track of a boat upon the sea—no sooner made than gone.

Many years had passed before I could untie a most narrow and irrational affection to the spot of my nativity; and before I could think that I could find happiness any where else. All that sort of prejudice, however deep it was, is erased now. But we have had many great men who never

emerged from their own country—Pope, I believe, never quitted England ; Johnson never got beyond Paris. Horace says,

Coelum, non animum, mutant, qui trans mare currunt.

But this is not strictly true : in many respects a great and important change of mind is effected. Not indeed by a hasty tour, by posting from city to city, slightly inspecting churches and palaces, and back again ; nor do I think that much is gained to the mind even by ascending Mont-Blanc or Vesuvius : but in a long and calm familiarity with characters, manners, laws, and literature of other countries, much is surely gained.

The power of thinking is the greatest distinction of the highest class of humanity. He who passes the subjects worthy of notice, which daily present themselves, without reflection, opinion, or sentiment, scarcely deserves the name of man. But I am convinced that a very large number cannot justly be said to think. If they express any opinions they are merely borrowed, and spoken like a parrot.

But to feel with quickness and depth, to ruminate profoundly, and to come to accurate conclusions, is not only a virtue and an honour, but a duty—as far as lies within the powers bestowed by nature—for many have no capacity for it, having an insensible heart and inapprehensive brain. Nor let those flatter themselves who merely

load their memories with what is dictated to them by the books or conversations of others. The total want is almost as well, for it is little better than impertinence.

It will be strange if the wider the field of observation, the mind does not become the more enlightened. I can hardly suppose that in the fifteen years since I first took up my abode on the Continent I have not gained a great accession of knowledge, and at least some increased strength of intellect. In age perhaps one does not so easily improve as in youth : but how Lord Byron's genius brightened and became invigorated by his residence in Switzerland and Italy ! I doubt whether he would have produced one of his finest poems if he had continued to reside in England.

In my "Recollections of Foreign Travel," (in two volumes, 8vo. 1825,) I have given an account of my movements, opinions and feelings, which it would be improper to repeat here, and which must be taken as part of my life. I went over nearly the same ground which Rogers went over almost at the same date. Those "Recollections" bring my diary down to about November, 1824, when I arrived at Paris from Geneva. I remained at Paris till June, 1826, when I returned to England, and remained till the 1st of November, 1828. I then passed again to Paris, and arrived once more at Geneva on the 15th November following.

In May and June, 1831, I wrote my Poem on "The Lake of Geneva" in seven books; and in that may be found a continuation of my sentiments and thoughts.

At Paris I occupied myself much among the magnificent riches of the Royal library, and there I compiled and printed my "*Stemmata Illustria*," folio, 1825, for the purpose of showing between two and three hundred descents from Charlemagne through different channels. In this laborious work I have taken much pains to ascertain the true origin of the Royal Houses of France and Austria; and the work may in other respects be found useful to all European genealogists and historians. I only printed a hundred copies, solely for private distribution.

One more work I have printed since my return to Geneva, which, though miscellaneous, may give perhaps some slight information or amusement to critical and biographical readers. I entitled it "*The Anglo-Genevan Journal, for 1831*," two vols. small 8vo., meaning to continue it; but I found the trouble and expense of sending the copies to England too great, and there could be no sale here for an English work sufficient to pay any part of the expenses. I have also printed here other things, of which I shall probably give a list at the end of this volume.

My mind will not endure idleness; and when left to its thoughts on individual concerns it preys

upon its own vitals. Intellectual employment therefore I must always have, even though I incur the censure of the *cacoethes scribendi*. My health is various, and has been at times for months together in a very dangerous state. In 1819 at Geneva, 1820 at Florence, and again at Geneva in 1829, 1830, and 1831, I was attacked by complaints which few thought I could survive. I am at this moment well, and can take my daily walks, though of course somewhat feeble under the weight of years.

I am now a recluse, thinking myself entitled to consult my own ease and tranquil habits, and to throw off all the vanities of the world; leaving others to make such comments on my appearance and my peculiarities as they choose without feeling any annoyance on my part. I dress as I like, keep my own hours, and conform to the world in nothing.

I do not justify those years I spent in researches into our old English literature; I think they might have been better employed. I regret that I did not more apply them to original composition, especially to works of imagination, because in those researches I was only doing what any one by mere toil could do. Now I have the presumption and arrogance to suppose that I was fitted by nature to do things which many could not do. I attribute something to my warmth of tempera-

ment and mental enthusiasm ;—and, though imagination is a quality which many have not been willing to concede to me, I know what is in me, and know that it is a light which is constantly playing before me without seeking for it. I lament, therefore, that of the innumerable visions which through life have haunted me, a larger portion have not been embodied.

I attribute it in great measure to having suffered myself to be discouraged by the blights and malice of the world. To have submitted to it was a cowardice amounting to a great mental fault. It is of the essence of genius to be bold and defiant—without it, it can do nothing great : discouragement and censure are as certain as that the night will follow the day.

I admit that we must assume, that he who can exert boldness with success has in him the qualities to excel. He who is bold without power is rash, and will assuredly have a fall. But he who is strong does not always know his own strength, and then opposition is perilous and sometimes fatal to him. It always happens that, however vehemently and ingeniously merit may be attacked, perseverance will overcome the injury ; and no ridicule ought to check one, because “ridicule is not the test of truth.” But then to stand firm against ridicule requires nerves which few possess. That possession Wordsworth has nobly

shown, and thus triumphed over all the virulent assailments to which he has so strangely been subjected.

No one can please all;— the flatterer and the satirist, the gentle and the rude, cannot coalesce. See how insulting Johnson is to some of his contemporaries, whom the public have finally agreed to place in the high ranks of fame. Johnson's love of detraction often amounted to immorality. Gray himself was fastidious, and a little inclined to deprecate his contemporaries. It is a prevailing passion, and few literary men are free from it; but I cannot refrain from avowing that it is a very base one. I was always struck with the manner in which Gray speaks of Akenside's "Pleasures of Imagination," and of Shenstone's "Poems," and even of Thomson's "Castle of Indolence," of which all that he says is, that it has a few good stanzas.

Bonstetten told me, that when he was walking one day with Gray in a crowded street of the city (about 1769), a large uncouth figure was rolling before them, upon seeing which Gray exclaimed, with some bitterness, "Look, look, Bonstetten!—the great bear!—There goes *Ursa Major*!" This was Johnson: Gray could not abide him. It must be confessed that he had but little reason to look upon the sturdy lexicographer with reverence.

There is certainly room enough in the world for

all the geniuses that ever have appeared, or ever will appear. They need not jostle each other. There is no motive therefore for exercising this ingenuity to find causes to decry. Genius may be cherished without excluding another from the place to which he aspires. Yet, however supererogatory, detraction will still prevail.

Still the fate of man is different : some are born to more ill-usage and more exposure to blights, frosts, and blasts than others, while from an excess of sensitiveness they can less bear them. Our destinies in this life are surely not equally balanced. Some have found friends, and cheers, and praise, and exaltation, who do not seem very well to have deserved them ; while others, with innocence, and energy, and capacity, have been thwarted at every step.

When it really does happen that an individual is endowed with those mental faculties which merit the name of genius, it is unlucky both for him and the world that they are not brought out. He is never happy when they smoulder within. No one will find them out for him, if he does not find them out himself. * It is idle to suppose that they will come out as a matter of course. It is by gradations of trials that the fleetest race-horse commonly wins the post.

It so happened, I think, that the literary fashion of the time was unpropitious to the character of

my mind. There was more of glare and eccentricity and wonder, than I had taste or power for. I never could submit to those labours and artifices, and those gaudy colours, and that varnish, by which a false splendour is given to poetry or prose fiction; nor could I go to the contrary extreme of nakedness and crude licentiousness. They who accustom their eyes to a modern gallery of pictures, where all is freshness and glare and violence of colouring, do not look with pleasure on the mellow tints and natural forms of the old masters.

Where the fruits are to come from native powers each one has a character and bent of his own. The faculties are combined in varying proportions, and according to those which are predominant will be the cast of character. Shut to him the path fitted for him, and the chances are that he will never come forward at all. And then no one will believe that nature gave him any powers above the common.

There is no opinion more common than that there is nothing in talents when they are not combined with what is called practical prudence. The question is, what is practical prudence? I believe that nothing is meant by it but craft and disguise. If Providence permits the affairs of the world to be carried on successfully only in this way, then talents are not wisdom. But I am willing to persuade myself that wickedness has

only partial success ; and that Satan has not an absolute and unlimited dominion over the world. As long as this which is styled practical prudence prevails, it is not sufficient to know what is right, but what is expedient ; and when expedience is admitted, what rule, principle, or faith have we to depend upon ? Then enters self-interest—and when the door is opened to that, who is secure of any thing in which others can interfere ?

Surely Providence does not give talents merely for the purpose of show and talk, without the power to influence actions, and control injustice and fraud. We may indeed suppose men to be sometimes theoretically wise, without the temper and firmness to put their opinions into execution with skill. This is the want of a sort of practical prudence, which is not at all inconsistent with the highest abilities.

I confess that I am myself of that irritable and frank temperament, which unfits me to be that sort of person who is vulgarly denominated a man of business. To be a man of business one must be cunning, reserved, plausible, deceitful, “with an open countenance and close thoughts.” But this does not require talent—rather the reverse.

Some men fall by a train of unavoidable circumstances into misfortunes out of which no human wisdom can extricate them. Villany may take its opportunities, which, though it would not succeed in common cases, it may be impossible to resist. A single mind might counteract ; but when

it has to play off more than one mind, it may turn to its own account the conflicting virtues of each. Satan has his emissaries, whom Providence permits to prowl for prey among mankind.

Will any one contend that it is in the power of an individual to choose in all cases among whom his lot shall be cast? Then are there not those from whom neither talents, nor virtue, nor courage, nor innocent prudence can defend one? To deny that the wicked prosper, is as if one should deny that the storm is strong.

But it is as criminal as it is brutal to oppose the truth of theoretical wisdom, because the baseness of mankind sometimes defeats its benefits in practice. Let those who have passed safely and calmly through life, without having been exposed by their fate to extraordinary trials, snares, and afflictions, refrain from too much conceit and arrogance at their good luck. It may not have been to their own merit or sense that their even tenour has been due.

It is the decree of Providence that some should have for ever to struggle against the stream. It would be vain to attempt to account for these mysteries of seeming inequality—we only know that they are. And he who gainsays them is struggling against facts of daily proof.

Such has been the order of Heaven, under which I have had to battle my way for numberless years. By complex means the foully dishonest have succeeded against me in spite of all my

insight into their designs, and my indignant repulsion of them. My own temper would have led me to wage war with them, even to the death. I am long before I suspect; but when I have proof—damning proof—then I say forbearance should be thrown away. I would not vex myself about little robberies; but all experience proves, that if we overlook little frauds, great ones will follow in an accumulating succession; as a hound that draws the first drop of blood, will never cease till he has drunk up the whole vital stream.

The exposure of the details of private affairs cannot with propriety be carried into all its particulars; and thus I forbear to relate the course of events which gave the lever for my being betrayed into the ambushes of these “lappers of the blood of human misfortune and sorrow;”—these reckless devourers with voracious appetites, and unrelenting and untired claws.

We must proceed firmly onward, regardless of perverse comments;—for do what we will, every thing will most certainly be misconstrued. He who injures one, almost always at the same time aggravates the injury by libelling one. Non-success is not a mere loss of benefits or rights, but brings on a prejudice against every act, thought, and quality of the unfortunate man. Success is a matter of fact which all can understand: the causes, movements, and progress of things few can understand.

CHAPTER VIII.

Literary acquaintance of the author at Geneva—Bonstetten's death—Two elegies on him—A mere list of names uninformative—Discrimination of characters necessary—Anecdotes deceitful—Men should be spoken of as they are—Power of drawing characters—Originality—Genevan want of imagination—Scenery—English at Geneva—Literary men should court retirement—Pleasure and benefits of retirement—Cowley—His admirable "Essays"—Light prattle—Necessary to bring forth what lies at the bottom—Autobiography—Lord Orford—Gray—Lives of inferior men—How far Pope's life is known—He could have told much more of himself—So, many other eminent men—Dryden—Autobiography of Byron—How much of deep interest he could have told—Pope's mode of life—Author's own intercourse with poetical scenes—Johnson in the Hebrides—Tasso in the vault of Ferrara—Petrarch at Vaucluse—Vulgar scepticism—Liability to misconstructions—Necessity of discriminative candour—Author's attention to scrupulous sincerity and truth—Consistent picture of mind—His love of simplicity, and hatred of floweriness—Mediocrity may succeed by charlatanism—Advantage taken of prejudices and ruling passions—Consistent standards of merit desirable—Constituents of poetry may be accurately fixed—Johnson's assertion of the difficulty of defining poetry—Too many books a mere manufacture or repetition—Process of gaining a dominion over ideas—How are ideal views embodied?—Inborn desire of knowledge—Benefits derived from the art of fixing ideas by the pen—Satisfaction of believing one's thoughts will thus survive one.

Among the literary men I have known at Geneva, many are dead,—as Professor Marc-Au-

guste Pictet, *ob.* 1825; his brother, Charles Pictet, *ob.* 1824; Dumont, the friend of Bentham, and author of "*Les Souvenirs de Mirabeau*," *ob.* 1829; Simond, *voyageur*, *ob.* 1831; Bonstetten, the friend of Gray, *ob.* February, 1832, *æt.* 87;—all eminent men. Among the living are, Sir Francis D'Ivernois, Sismondi, Professor P. Prevost, Professor Picot, Professor De Candolle, Dr. Matthey, Mons. Hesse, Professor Rossi, Mons. Grenus-Saladin, Count de Sellon, Mons. Galiffe. Sir Francis D'Ivernois continues at a great age to pursue his most useful inquiries as an European statist with admirable sagacity and precision; and his calculations of the comparative longevity of the several populations of the chief nations of Europe are instructive, original, and profound.

I was glad to know Bonstetten on account of his intimacy with our poet Gray; and I sent a short memoir of him to the "*Gentleman's Magazine*," which I presume found insertion.

I must confess that a mere list of names gives but little instructive information; but I am not sure that I could add any thing to the account the public already possess of those here mentioned, and I am not willing to fill my book with trite common-place. Every thing said ought either to instruct or to amuse. The opinions and the sentiments ought to have both truth and force, and something at least of the freshness of

novelty. Insipid compliments, and praise which means nothing, fill many volumes of memoirs ; but discrimination of character, honestly related, is necessary to give them value. Anecdotes are very popular, but I confess I suspect that they oftener mislead than not : it rarely happens that they are not embellished, and that truth is not sacrificed to point. I frankly own that I think this is the case with no small part of Lord Orford's writings. As it is among primary knowledge to know human characters such as they have been found in real life,—in the same degree, if they have been drawn inaccurately and with false colours, is the perniciousness of the error. Men should “ be spoken of as they are,—nothing extenuated, nor ought set down in malice ;” but still all should be told with candour, and there should be a due mixture of light and shade to mellow the portrait.

Some few men have the gift of drawing striking and exact portraits of character, which express not only the outward visage and form, but the very soul. This is effected by a native penetration made up of the light of imagination, controlled and sharpened by observance.

In an original work it is not my practice to repeat what I hear, any more than what I read : my business is with my own opinions and remarks. It is well known that the Genevans, notwithstanding they produced Rousseau, have

little taste for works of imagination; their principal bent is towards technical studies. Looking at the scenery among which they live, this appears very surprising to me. This scenery is both magnificent and beautiful; but when I returned back from Naples in 1821, I thought it faded in the comparison.

Vast quantities of English have been here at times, and I have been acquainted with many of them; but at present I prefer my recluse life. I do not think a literary man much fitted for common conversation, or that he acts prudently in mixing indiscriminately with society. Were I to pass my life over again with my present convictions, my resolution would be to spend my days in absolute retirement, and with the simplest establishment and the most frugal wants. When free from the irritation of contending multitudes, what is pomp and show? If we mix in the mob, we do not like to be trod under foot. Still there is something delightful in the hospitable table, where we find

The feast of reason and the flow of soul!

I have the example of Cowley for pouring out my thoughts and sentiments in this manner. His "Moral Essays" are entirely so written; and from them we know more of the interior of his character, than from all his other works and all the biographies of him. There is nothing more

beautiful in the English language, both in matter and style, than these "Essays."

Having undertaken the perilous task of giving conscientiously a true representation of my own mind, I have struggled with some anxiety to execute my design. I have gone on the assumption that what Johnson says of autobiography in the "Rambler" is just; and that even an obscure person, who tells frankly and honestly his thoughts and feelings, can thus make an interesting and instructive work. It has always seemed so to me, and I never read such a work without curiosity and pleasure; but it is essential that it should have no ambition, vanity, or varnish about it, and that sincerity should be its prime quality. Many exhibit themselves in full etiquette and ornamented costume, as if they were dressed for court. This is not to be borne. A memoir-writer may delude himself, but he must not falsify. If he does delude, the delusion forms part of his character; and he must take the consequence.

There is a sort of light prattle and gossip, of which some memoirs are made up. They are written as a man of the world, of small talent, who has cultivated the art of conversation, talks. These tell nothing but the surface of things, and that inaccurately. Careless readers, of no penetration, think they get intelligence from them; though, on the contrary, they rather encourage their previous vacancy of views. The want of

heart and want of depth in them disgusts the strong mind, which requires solid food.

But he on whom the visible and invisible world makes deep impressions, and who has a heart that trembles in accordance with the impressions of his head, cannot choose but bring forth what lies at the bottom of his inward spirit, if he once takes the pen to write about himself. He will then elicit and embody numerous ideas, which would otherwise have died in thinking.

Much of the value of what he produces will depend on the degree of his genius or ability. If his originality is powerful and his judgment sound, what he writes will be that sort of ore which will retain its use in a hundred ways. On numerous moral topics we delight to know the opinions and feelings of a thinking and strong mind, and especially to know internal movements and private convictions. Autobiography necessarily forces the attention inwards upon self; and if we have a clear sight, it is there, beyond all other subjects, in which our materials are at our own command. The heart of another we can only imagine; our own heart we must know, unless we court delusion.

Did such a man as Lord Orford represent himself what he was, or only such as he wished to appear? He was a mingled character, which it is difficult to analyze. He was frank enough in owning some of his own petty passions, but his

imagination was turned to certain classes of artificiality in manners and arts. When therefore he was frank, he was frank of artificial feelings. He had a species of aristocracy which is now gone out; perhaps too much gone out. Gray had the good part, without the bad part, of it. When Gray in his "Letters" lets out his private feelings, there is always a spell in them that electrifies. I do not recollect a single passage of this kind in Lord Orford: yet his "Castle of Otranto" is a fiction of genius, and there are in it a few touches even of pathos. He had a great portion of the French *esprit*, with more imagery; and he cultivated the love of the ridiculous with an assiduity in which there was not a little spite. He had no grand ideas, but always saw the trivial parts of another's character.

But our curiosity is not confined to a disclosure of the minds of men so eminent as these; we should be glad to know also how work far inferior intellects and bosoms;—but not equally glad, because the interest must necessarily be in proportion to the qualities of the head and heart so displayed.

It is supposed that we know all that can be known, or is required to be known, of Pope; but if he had written a Life of himself with openness and *naïveté*,—of which indeed the character of his "Letters" does not give much promise,—we should have had a hundred valuable disclosures

which are now buried in the grave. I do not think much of Spence's "Anecdotes" of the poet; they are trifling, though better than nothing, and very proper to have been preserved by the press. We know Pope's peevishness and irritability, but we cannot doubt that he had many splendid and exalted feelings; and his acuteness and sagacity rendered his opinions of the human character invaluable. He must have been acquainted with much of his contemporaries which has never been preserved in writing,—of St. John, Harley, Addison, Swift, Prior, Gay, Congreve, Garth, Dryden, Burlington, Bathurst, Fenton, Broome, Tickell, Rowe, Arbuthnot, Warburton, &c. But Dryden wrote with more ease, more transparency, less reserve of opinion, and in a far better style of prose, than Pope; though his opinions were often fickle and unsettled. Pope could never have suffered himself to appear in *deshabille*—he was too keenly alive to the opinions of the world.

It may have been well that those "Memoirs of Byron" by himself, which were given by him to Moore, were burned; but Byron could have written an autobiography better than any other author I could name. No poet ever looked so deeply and so brilliantly into himself: he evoked all the hundred spirits within him, and they answered to his call—he tore the fugitive secrets of the soul from their hiding-places, and brought

them out to astonish the gazer, and make him tremble or glow. That he often felt more violently than others, whether the passion was good or evil, cannot be questioned; and then his feeling was always mixed up with profound thought: and the figures of this mingled cauldron, which threw themselves out in flames of terrific grandeur, he knew how to watch, discriminate, and throw into language. These combined powers and acquirements fitted him to be the first of all autobiographers. The storm is sublimer than a clear, sunshiny, and blessed day; so was Byron's internal being grander than a bright, cheerful, genial mind and temperament. He was fierce, vindictive, and daring in anger, though crossed by flashes of benevolence and intense tenderness: he revenged insults sometimes with too unsparring retribution, so that the devil seemed to have full dominion over him for a time; but then he recovered and threw the fiend from him with a gigantic force.

Pope led a life calculated to strengthen his intellectual, but not to enrich and elevate his imaginative faculties. He lived among wits of rank and fashion, and statesmen of powerful abilities. The age in which he lived was not an imaginative age; it was an age of reason, and good sense, and classical propriety: but whatever may be the use of these merits, they do not nurse the highest poetical flights. Byron's actual life

was a life of passion and poetry, spent in poetical scenes. So was that of Burns.

I have also spent part of my life in poetical scenes, but not in Greece like Byron. My life also has been a life of trials and incessant emotions. A dull, uniform life lets the imagination sleep and become torpid. I have no doubt that scenery and climate have a great effect upon the spiritual part of imagination, as well as upon the material. Johnson, I think, became more imaginative after he had visited the Hebrides: at any rate, when our minds contemplate him carried about on the waves of the stormy ocean in which those islands are placed, and sleeping with the northern billows beating at the feet of the castellated rock where he is hospitably received, we have a pleasing idea of him, which revolts at the disputatious dreariness and vulgarity of Bolt Court.

It is said that Tasso wrote some of his finest poetry in the dismal vault of Ferrara, which I have seen with horror. I cannot give credit to this. His wild and splendid mind was fed and furnished by his wanderings, and blazed by the troubled passions which pursued him and haunted him through his dreamy existence. In the picturesque solitude of Vacluse, Petrarch drank in his romantic passion for Laura. Milton and Gray had visited Italy before they wrote their finest poems.*

There are those who will not believe things which are before their eyes and in their hearts, because they cannot reason upon them and account for them. Thus it is sometimes with the visions of the mind, and the delight we receive from them : they say that they will not have pleasure in them because they consider them to be unsolid and fanciful. Ideal apparitions are as powerful as material realities.

While I am venturing these opinions and sentiments, I am too anxiously aware of the misconstructions which perverse ill-will may give them. They will assert or insinuate that to put myself in such company, and invest myself with such circumstances, is insane conceit or vanity. But let it be recollected that I have laboured for fifty years in my vocation, and that I have supported myself through good report and evil report,—in sorrows, calumnies, privations, and dangers of gigantic violence ; and that, if I have not done all which I might have done and ought to have done, my works are still not rejected by those whose notice is fame.

We must not be too severe in allowing claims to distinction by individuals above the mass of mankind. If indeed they are too lightly conceded, distinction loses its value and essence. Yet though there may be some things not accordant to various tastes, and many things wanting which some may deem indispensable, yet if there

be a fund of thought and feeling,—if that thought be unborrowed and that feeling sincere, and if at the same time it be just and forcible,—is not such an author entitled to a candid and favourable reception?—and may he not be excused for setting himself right with the world, in opposition to contumely, error, and wilful falsehood?

How far I have preserved scrupulous sincerity and truth, others must decide; but I lay claim to them with the most earnest and undoubting protestations. I have varnished nothing, nor set forth for plausibility's sake any thoughts or sentiments which I do not privately entertain. As to the facts of private and family history which are interwoven, I defy a disproof of them. How far the public may think them of sufficient weight to be told, is not for me to determine. Almost all of them connect themselves by some link with the biographical history of the nation; nor is there scarce one of which some notice has not been taken in print before I was born; for instance,—Egerton, Gibbon, Mainwaring, Yorke, Head, Hamilton, Ent, Barrett, Robinson, Montagu, Cavendish, Stanley, Clifford, &c. &c.: so that their station in society need not depend on my representation, but may be verified by numerous authorities easily consulted by all.

As to the pictures of my own mind, it will scarcely be denied that they are consistent with the tenour of all that I have published in succes-

sion,—not interrupted by long intervals,—from January, 1784,* to this day, 30th July, 1833, wanting only five months of fifty years. I have always argued for simplicity of style in poetry, and rejection of unmeaning flowers: this, my first composition in print, to which I here allude, will prove that my practice commenced conformable to my canons.

If I had adopted more glare, and had had more violent colours; more violent imagery, and more extravagant incidents, thoughts, and reflections, I might, and am convinced I should, have attracted more notice; but I could only write what my heart dictated, and could never lash myself into foam. I am one of those who think that adventitious merits have no claim to much celebrity or favour; and that only those to whom nature has been bountiful in some high intellectual power ought to be marked out among literati. To confound with them the mere creatures of labour and the merely mediocre in talent, is to do great mischief: it depresses energy, blights hope, and fades the laurel.

Mediocrity may gain temporary reputation by charlatanism; indeed it actually does so every day, by puffs and tricks, and tinsel, and exaggeration, and flattery of popular appetites and po-

* See the "Verses to Miss L. L. on her departure," in the "Gentleman's Magazine," January, 1784.

pular passions. Nothing is more absurd and more nauseous than the paid critiques on such works, which appear in some of the minor journals; but where vendibility is the object, they answer the purpose. Unfortunately, literature is now turned to become the engine of disseminating false and mischievous political principles; and productions are praised, not for their literary merit, but to gild the pill of political poison. It is frightful to observe how much is done by *ruse*, and how little by genuine power. Every thing is done by violent contrast,—by surprise and novelty created by unnatural combinations. To bring out those nicer and hidden operations by which Nature carries on her purposes, requires other faculties, and more acute and clearer perceptions.

They who take advantage of the ruling prejudices and fashions of the moment, only make impressions, because their readers are already prepared to receive them, and meet them more than half way. When the fit of the crisis is past, every one wonders how such authors could awaken the smallest interest.

Were fame distributed by any consistent rules, even though those rules were not entirely just, authors would know what to rely upon; but we need only look at the roll of authors placed according to popular estimation, to convince us how little regard is had to any one standard. It is true that the surer judgment of more intelligent

critics, in a long course of time, new arranges the list in a more correct manner, and lets many names drop which never had pretensions to be there.

I cannot see why the constituents of poetry should not be so precisely settled, that the rank of every one who is admitted among its priesthood could be easily and unequivocally determined. Johnson says definitions are dangerous, especially of poetry ; but I do not perceive either the danger or the difficulty. Johnson could define well, but in this case he had his reasons for not liking a definition : any just definition would have excluded or placed low a great many productions which he wished to admit or place high. It will be said that an author's estimation of himself, whether high or low, will not alter the character or degree of his faculties ; but if he has too low an opinion, it may greatly deteriorate their real force, because nothing is more true than that most people *possunt, quia posse videntur*—and that he who has not confidence, rarely succeeds even when he has the power. “ While the notion of want of power,” says Johnson, “ has possession of the head, it produces the inability it supposes. Our powers owe much of their energy to our hopes.”

The greater part of the books which are brought forth are little better than manufactures, or the pourings-out of memory. This sort of *crambe*

recto is very nauseous. He who has no mind of his own to look into, had better lay down his pen; and even if he has a mind of his own, it must be a mind of good quality,—rich and sound. By what processes the mental faculties arrive at that dominion over ideas by which rectitude of opinion and sentiments is acquired, no one can presume accurately to trace: these must be inborn gifts, but they must be cultivated with skill and industry.

It must be supposed that all minds have a wide field of ideal views before them, on which they are accustomed to gaze: how happens it that so few can embody them, and put them into shape and language? Do they behold them as congregated in masses of formless clouds? Can they neither seize nor discriminate any thing? Instead of reducing them into order, are they obliged to copy what others have already done? But perhaps there are those who have no ideal views, and who only see things in their material presence. But even animals have some imagination; otherwise how could they dream,—as a hound in his sleep dreams that he is in full chase?

We come into the world with a desire of knowledge, which grows in proportion as we cherish it. We are impatient to learn the nature and causes of things, as a child tears open his fiddle that he may find out whence the sound comes. And

what we are curious to know, we are generally desirous to tell : the impulse arises partly from a wish to gain notice, and partly from a social feeling.

Had not the art of writing been discovered, many would not have been aware of the powers of their own genius ; because, for whatever cause, they could not have delivered themselves clearly in conversation. The self-possession of the closet, and the time given to think, enable an author to digest his thoughts and arrange his language in a way he could not have done orally.

It is pleasant to think that what one has fixed by the pen and paper will remain, when one is silent in the grave, in as full force as when it was written. Horace says, *Non omnis moriar* ;—but may any puny author like me presume to say so ?

CHAPTER IX.

Death of the Duke of Sutherland—Rapid succession of mortality among the Egerton blood—Author accused of aristocratical pride—Female descent—Gower family—Old baronial families—Power of wealth—Aboriginal nobility—"Stemmata Illustria"—Contents of first volume of "Dugdale's Baronage"—Feelings of *parvenus*—Glory of descent from genius or heroism—Personal pretensions—Literary amateurs—Can we judge ourselves—Imagination—Classes of imagination—Minds come from another world—Ideal models—Charms of Autumn—Citation from Wrangham's *Horace*—How far low spirits affect imagination—Fictions of artificial life—Tainted air of cities—Visionary faculty—Power of embodying it rare—Sameness in literature—Fear often restrains the expression of original thought—What hidden inscriptions the poet brings out—Instruction of genuine poetry—Poetry fostered one day; neglected another—Insensibility to the invisible world—Descriptions of pure material images—Utility—Cocker's "Arithmetic"—Author's principles of poetry not partial or narrow—These canons require rare endowments—These canons not trite, nor generally acknowledged—Poetical criticisms of "Edinburgh Review"—If the author's canons are wrong, they may be refuted—Italian school of poetry superior to the French—Johnson's test as to Pope—Little poetical invention in the great body of English poetry—Want of genius endeavoured to be supplied by what is strained and extravagant—Technical critics love technical compositions.

ON this day, 30th July, 1833, I have received intelligence at Geneva that the Duke of Sutherland died at the ancient castle of his Duchess in the northern part of Scotland about ten days ago,

aged seventy-five years and a half. He was the head of my mother's family by his mother, who was sister to the last Duke of Bridgewater. Not only are all the male Egertons of the Bridgewater branch now, as it seems, extinct, but those who are half Egertons by the mother* are reduced to seven or eight. I am one of these very few, whose own mother was an Egerton.† The lustre of the Bridgewater family cannot be doubted by any one who is an English genealogist. I need not repeat what is to be found in the Peerages. I did not know the Duke of Sutherland; but all are aware that he was enormously rich; and in early life it was said that he gave the promise of talent,—which is surely a much better possession than riches. He was reported to be reserved and haughty.

I am accused of an insane degree of genealogical pride. I care nothing for collaterals: I have no reason to care for them. I have never courted them, and they have never paid any attention to me. If there be any thing in blood, it as much belongs to one as to the other. All that strikes me is this,—that a distinguished female descent will not do, unless there is an honourable male stock to graft it upon.

These are always doubtful ingredients, which,

* Earl Granville, half-brother of the late Duke of Sutherland, was by a second wife.

† Mr. Egerton of Tatton is only an Egerton by his grandmother.

if they do not turn to good, turn to ill ; such are the streams of high blood. Sometimes the consciousness of lofty descent leads in mean minds to impertinence and insolence : there is a sort of mixture of affected graciousness and arrogant taunt which is utterly insufferable.

The family of Gower is of considerable antiquity in Yorkshire, as gentry :—but their peerage is scarcely more than one hundred and thirty years old. They have enriched themselves by marriages, — which began with the Levesons. Since their peerage, they have always taken an active part about the court and in politics. They were one of the first houses whom Mr. Pitt promoted in the ranks of the peerage, by adding a marquissate to their earldom.

The old baronial families have been so intermixed with those of more recent date, that the public does not know them ; and they scarcely recognise their own dignity. A jobbing ministry will always regard wealth and present power rather than birth and historical lustre. To base minds birth is nothing unless it be set off by riches and sounding titles.

To me, I confess, there seems a want of genuine splendor, unless there be what I call aboriginal nobility. By this I mean that very ancient nobility which has an historical appearance of being derived from Charlemagne. This seems to have been the case with almost all

the first Anglo-Norman earls and chief baronial houses. I have endeavoured to show this somewhat fully in my "*Stemmata Illustria*." There I have given nearly three hundred tables of descents, through different great families, from Charlemagne.

The first volume of "*Dugdale's Baronage*" contains all the Anglo-Norman peerage to the death of King Henry III. I can trace a descent from at least four-fifths of the whole of this number, and am entitled to quarter the arms of almost all the principal of them. Persons may, and will, dispute that there is any thing in noble and splendid descent: but if there is any thing in it, they cannot deny that it lies in such a lineage. As to the rest, there may be descent from most of them also; but as they are the names of those who lasted but a little while, and of whom scarce any thing is known that is important, I have no certain means of tracing their posterity. Of the rest, I cannot bring my mind to say with Ovid, *Vix ea nostra voco!*

The French call me "*fou d'aristocratie!*" Let revilers make what they will of my confessions. The *parvenus* say that all centres in self: they care nothing for ancestors. Then what is history? Had they not better burn all the annals of the past? Is it nothing to be the descendant of geniuses, statesmen, legislators, and heroes? If one

could trace from Spenser, or Shakspeare, or Milton, would that be nothing? Would it be nothing to be the son of Nelson, or Burke, or Fox, or Pitt? The greatest man in European history is Charlemagne : and from him my blood flows through three hundred channels.

Have I derived any of my own enthusiasm from these ancestors? Or is it an accidental state of blood which has begun and will end with me? Of all things, I protest against being considered as a mere literary *amateur*, whose claims depend on his casual application to books and composition. If nature has done nothing for me, let me give up intellectual labours. But it will again be asked, Can any one appreciate his own mental qualities? I have myself a very clear opinion that he can. Every one knows when he performs his task easily, and when he is obliged to struggle. Nor can he fail to distinguish between memory and original thought. But then if it be original, can he appreciate its truth or force? It appears to me that no one can mistake weakness for force : he may be more likely to mistake error for truth.

There is a faculty of the mind, about which I cannot suppose that any one can delude himself for a moment : this is imagination. If he cannot see real objects, he is blind, and knows that he is blind :—if he cannot see ideal objects, he has

no imagination; and must know that he has no imagination. He can also distinguish between what is reflected by the mirror of his fancy, and what is produced by his own creation.

The imagination which employs itself in petty decorations, which adds flowers and colours only, is of little value. It must deal in day-dreams, and visions as bright as the heavens. This is the charm of life: man thus clothes himself with wings, and rises into a higher order of existence. Realities, which the sober eye of reason dissects, are but dull things.

We bring a mind with us from another world, and we shall carry it back to another world; so that we are conversant with other objects than this globe exhibits. But why do we let them pass away without painting them? Is it true philosophy to suppress and destroy these delusions? We are always nursing in our brain some ideal person as a model to us; and we see him on the mountains, on the lakes, and in the valleys! When we are mournful, he comforts us;—when we are alone, he talks to us;—when we are insulted, he soothes and encourages us; thus we raise worlds over which we have dominion, and breathe ethereal air!

I love the month of August: it is the commencement of the fading year. I have always found a pleasing melancholy in the fall of the leaves, from my early childhood, when I collected them

into heaps, and made bowers and huts of them. Thomson has described this melancholy admirably. But why should we like the year's decline? Does not old age come upon us too fast? And why should we like storms and cold better than sunshine and genial warmth? A contemplative mind loves the fireside; and the darkness of winter is a veil which nurses thought.

This puts me in mind of one of my favorite odes of Horace,—the 9th of the 1st book—“*Vides ut altâ,*” and my friend Archdeacon Wrangham’s translation :

“ Seest thou, dear friend, how white with snow
Towers in mid air Soracte’s brow ;
How with their load the forests bend,
And frost the torrent’s force has chain’d ?
The season’s chilling cold to chase,
Bid on thy hearth huge fagots blaze ;
And from the twin-ear’d pitcher pour
Thine inmost bin’s time-mellow’d store ;
Leave to the gods all cares beside !”—

&c. &c.

Bloomfield’s mother said that three fiends haunted her,—Winter, Poverty, and Old Age. She must have had a comfortless mind so to view them.

In some sorts of gloom the imagination plays : but there is a lowness of spirits which crushes it. I have sometimes experienced this ; and then every object loses its tints, and a brown horror overlays all the scenery of earth. It is reality in its most barren and offensive forms.

I hate those fictions which represent society

in its worst and meanest artificialities,—those petty passions of accidental and temporary life and manners,—those odious fashions of folly and vanity, on which feeble intellects and debased hearts pride themselves. These do not deserve the name of fiction in its favourable sense. Many of them are mere copies of individuals, and actual events, drawn with a coarse exaggeration. Their moral tendency is bad, because they enforce trifles, and those prejudiced views of things, of which it is the first duty of the mind to get rid. The imagination of genius always looks to exalt, or soften and spiritualize. It always wanders away from daily life and the mean struggles of society. It sits alone upon the rock, and meditates upon the murmurs and the rolling of the ocean.

It is frightful to live among the tainted air, smoke, noise, squalidness, and bad passions of great cities. There the senses must grow callous, and the heart must harden. The elasticity of the vital breath must become languid and dull. There imagination dies, and human nature becomes imbruted. There is no hope, because all is palpable and undisguised wretchedness. But in the free air, by the woods and the streams, perhaps the coldest mind may be awakened; because the fibres of the brain are kept in health and tremulous emotion.

I suspect that this visionary faculty is not un-

~~owning~~, but that the possessors cannot embody their visions for want of practice and exertion. We have not in literature many fictions of this kind carried to a great extent. It is a wide and eloquent field for labour, which would bring great delight and exaltation. We often see shapes sitting in clouds of a celestial beauty, or sublimity; or skimming over the waves, or lifted on pinions above our heads. But we let them pass, to describe vulgar earthly objects. We follow the tracks of others, and continue to neglect, because our predecessors have neglected. Thus there is a fatiguing sameness in literature; and we go on in the same beaten paths till all energy dies.

It is not improbable that many authors who have ideas of their own, do not venture to express them, but through mere timidity repeat what their memory supplies: this is a miserable sort of cowardice. Johnson, in his "Life of Thomson," speaks of the poet's eye, which sees and selects what is most beautiful in the forms of nature: but this is not a poet's first business; it is to associate with those material forms spiritual ideas and sentiments. These sleep in the brains or hearts of many readers till awakened by the poet's touch:—here lies the poet's spell. And if he does not do this, he fails in the chief aim he ought to have. If he only tells that with which every one is already familiar, what good does he do? The poet brings out the hidden and

mysterious inscriptions in the clouds, in the air, and on the surface of the earth. He is not the inventor of whimsical fantasticalities, but the oracle of truth. It is the abuse of poetry, and the false productions which take its name, that bring it into contempt, as an idle and childish art.

Whenever poetry takes a right course, it conveys instruction more important than any other branch of human literature. For what knowledge is so important as that which lets us into the secret movements of the heart and head, and which teaches us how to think and feel? If we resolve to be dull, and to glory in our dulness, let us throw aside the poet's lessons. He will not teach us how to get money, or how to play the crafty man's part in the world: nor will he teach us to excel in any thing manual or practical. But as it is by mind that man lives in this globe superior to all other created beings, he will display to us—what is consequently most necessary—all the field of mind.

Poetry is the rage of one day—the glut and neglect of another. This is because the multitude will always be capricious and changeable: and at one time they will not hear an angel's voice, while at another they will listen delighted to the rhymes of a bellman. The proof that a genuine poet ought to be read with interest, is no proof that he will be so. Some are unwilling

to have their better ideas and affections stirred, because they suppose it would unfit them to bustle with the world; and it is true that it has a tendency to make them too susceptible for rough society. I do not think that the temperament of poetry is fit for those who are condemned to the hard and cunning offices of life.

But to live in a world partly inhabited by spirits, and to be utterly unconscious of them, is brutality. If Providence has not given the faculties to apprehend what is invisible, the defect must be endured: but voluntarily to abandon what may thus be perceived, is crime. He who does not know what is taught by the best poets,—and by them only,—is of an inferior order of beings! And he is so, whether his ignorance is by his own default, or by the denial of nature. When listening to the solemn moanings of the wind in the middle of the night, when all else is silent, the poetic mind hears the mighty converse of spirits among the trembling foliage. Nothing is so sublime and affecting as the hollow swell of the gusts; and then its dying falls!

It is but a low strain to describe what all can outwardly see, and repeat what beings of mere materiality say. Descriptions, therefore, of actual manners and observations upon common life belong to a mean class of poetry. I am aware that this is the reverse of the general opinion. It re-

quires so much less fineness of intellect in the reader to relish such descriptions and observations, than the airy movements of mind! What is visible to the naked eye can be commented upon by all mankind; and their actual and practical habits and conduct can escape no one's notice. It is well to have a rectitude of opinion upon these things, but they may be taught by meaner preceptors.

Vulgar arguers will insist on utility; but the baker and the shoemaker are more useful in the ordinary sense, than the most splendid genius. Usefulness must be estimated by its dignity and refinement. By ordinary measure, a horse or cow may be more useful than an intellectual being, and a pig perhaps more useful still. The multiplication-table is thus more useful than the greatest discoveries of Newton. Johnson thought so, I presume;—when on his tour the book which he carried in his pocket was “Cocker’s Arithmetic.”

It will be said that I have laboured to establish my own ideas of poetry, that I might adapt them to what I have conceived to have been my own practice; this will not be a just censure. I have put forth a standard much too high for myself; and I have put it without reference to self. I deny that my notions of poetry are narrow: and I am the more convinced they are right, because they agree not only with all an-

cient canons from Aristotle downwards, but with the actual merits of all who from the beginning of time have uniformly been conceded the reputation of the greatest poets. Those notions are narrow which are confined to particular models, artificial rules, and temporary favourites.

If my principles on this subject are correct, it will follow that none but a mind of rare endowments ought to attempt poetry. The intellect must be lofty, strong, and subtle; the heart must be tremulous, fiery, and tender; the fancy must be brilliant; above all, the imagination must be visionary, spiritual, inventive, sagacious, sound, and correct. And after this, we may address to the aspirant the words of Collins in his "Ode on the Poetical Character."

Then will come the objection, that I am tediously dwelling on points already settled for ages. It is true that they have been long settled by the best authorities; but in many instances of later years they have so far been brought back into doubt, that there is no subject on which the public has at this day less consistent opinions. There are numerous beautiful criticisms on poetry in the "Edinburgh Review;" but they are in no degree consistent with each other. Every article must be considered by itself; for, taken together, they are continually contradictory; principles are laid down in each, adapted for or against the particular work chosen to be criticized. At one

time the flowers of poetry are commended ; at another its stem and naked sublimity :—here, overwhelming force ; there, melting tenderness.

Let it be shown, if my opinions are wrong, where they are so ! I have given my reasons, and I believe that my *dicta* have never been vague and fantastic. I have certainly placed the Italian school of poetry above the French ; but the very name of the word Poetry determines this question, unless it can be shown that poetry does not mean creation or imaginative invention. And thus the question about Pope is decided by a simple word.

Johnson asks in his arrogant way, “ If Pope is not a poet, who is ? ” This is easily answered. Fifty might be named at once without difficulty, beginning with Homer and Virgil, and going to Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, &c. Some suppose the book of Job to be a poetical invention : it has many of its noblest qualities.

In the vast and fatiguing mass of English verses, I assert that there is very little poetical invention ; and that there is a resort to diction—sometimes happy, often crude—to cover the defect. The consequence is, that there is a want of life, force, and probability, in most of these compositions. They are put together without inspiration, or enthusiasm, by mere toil and art. In proportion as there is a want of genius, there

is always an attempt at something far-fetched and striking. They who are carried on by the presence and activity of an ideal object cannot wait to work up the prettinesses and false glitter of an artificial style. And when it is done, the fashion of this artificial style is always changing : one age always admires something varying from another : and what it rejects, it is disgusted with ; so that from a beauty it becomes a deformity.

They who have no taste always require false stimulants ; stimulants which operate less upon the intellect and the interior of the bosom, than upon the external faculties. What is executed by technical art and toil can be apprehended by technical art and toil. To the delicate and magical touches of genius, art and toil are insensible.

CHAPTER X.

Different tastes as to the proper matter of biography—Facts or opinions—These last associated with an individual life—Boasters—Interest in frank confessions—Effect of autobiographies—Truth and its application to individuals are separate questions—Happiness of rightly fixing one's own position—Psychology—Few books teach any thing new—Authors must seek truth, and calmly abide the result—Benefit of dispersing the mists of mind—Candidates for fame must not choose their own place—Memorialists may bring their claims into notice—Intellect not given for self—Edinburgh Review on Moore's "Life of Sheridan"—Imagination too short in its flight—Beattie—Persons will not be convinced against their will—Our evil passions destroy our happiness—Fame flies in proportion as it is pursued—Why be unhappy at the want of genius?—All unreasonable passions afflict us—Gold is the only idol of the world—Love of fame cannot be eradicated—Temporary fame often not to be accounted for—A mechanical author dangerous to society—Definition of the best poetry—Spangles of style reprov'd—Native pre-eminence of intellect often denied—Technical critics interested in this—Authors must give something new—Mortification of inability—Author's regret at not having always written boldly and without check—His inborn timidity—Charge of querulousness—His doubt how this memoir will be received—Delicacy in speaking of living contemporaries—Danger of indiscriminately registering conversations—Statesmen of great genius—Power of drawing character—Clarendon and Saint Simon—Gossip—Sir Nathaniel Wraxall—Opinions of an aged letter-writer worth something—Age hardens native barrenness—Reflections do not outlast the moment except in minds of imagination—Essences of thought.

I AM aware that there is great difference of taste among readers as to the sort of matter which is most interesting in autobiography. The greater

part like facts; the better part like opinions, reflections, and sentiments. The reason is, that facts are more easily understood than what is intellectual. But the chances are, that he who has had an eventful life has little to say which is instructive to others. Facts are striking in proportion as they are singular, and therefore do not apply to others.

Some may remark on this that then essays would be better than biography, and that it would be preferable to have the whole matter general at once. But when associated with an individual life they have something of a personified animation, and the force of individual feeling and experience. We want to know of an author, who has written on subjects extraneous to himself, what are his own private convictions and sentiments. I believe that this curiosity is very generally prevalent.

I have always been in the habit of registering in language, and often in poetry, the impressions and humours of the moment. It eases my bosom of a load. These are scattered about in numerous irregular volumes, or lost in the chaos of my papers; and I often totally forget them, till by some accident they fall in my way.

I suspect that a boaster is universally hated or despised; but he who lets out his weaknesses and throws himself upon our mercy, often engages our interest and affection. What is written

superficially or disguisedly is always detected and estimated at its due worthlessness. What is written profoundly and truly is sure to prevail at last. There are thousands unknown to the world who yet seek for truth and have a sagacious judgment.

What has been the effect as to those who have given memoirs of themselves? They have certainly enabled the public to judge of them more accurately, whether for good or for bad, than if they had not executed this task. There is nothing more useful than a precise discrimination of the mental and moral qualities of mankind, and their gradations in the scales of virtue and dignity. These distinctions may be made by understandings of deep investigation with an accuracy which cannot be resisted or called into question. Perhaps a self-memorialist may be able to do it; but then may he not furnish principles, rules, and authorities for his own condemnation? Yet if he fails to do it, and bends his arguments and conclusions plausibly to his own case, he does but expose himself to be refuted and cast down. He has therefore a responsibility upon him to speak the truth, if he can discover it.

What is the general truth, and how far it applies to self, are distinct questions, which should be kept entirely separate. When we have settled the first apart, it will be much less difficult to decide the other. But if we could rightly fix our

own position, and fix it high, should we be the happier for it? I believe that a clear and firm sense of our superiority does contribute to our happiness. To attain it is a desire implanted in us by Providence for good purposes. But then the *arbitrium popularis auræ* moves us like a weathercock if we regard it. We must look for some stay independent of it. To be at the mercy of capricious opinion is misery.

I labour therefore to estimate with rigid and stern inquiry what faculties of the mind ought most to prevail. Psychology is a difficult science, in which much yet remains to be done. But the classification of the understanding commonly received, by which its different powers are defined, must be admitted. Then, having a clear apprehension what they are, we can decide whether an individual is endowed with them; for instance, whether such individual has imagination? If two persons dispute this, the chances are that the dispute turns on the different meaning they affix to the word.

The greater part of books, whatever be the subject, teach nothing new, nor raise in the reader any new train of ideas. I should be inclined therefore to cast them by my *Index Expurgatorius* out of the library. A man when he has borrowed an incursion of ideas new to himself, is apt to think that he has made discoveries, and turns author. But an higher power than this is required. In

settling these points he may be amused or interested, but how is the public concerned in them? It is concerned, because it aids the developments of the history of mind. I consider what engages my attention in other memoirs, and I suppose that I may have the same good luck with other readers.

But no author can surely anticipate where he shall please or displease. * He can do no more than seek for truth, without looking to the right or left. Folly, and flattery, and falsehood, will be discovered and laid bare, though they may gratify the momentary appetite of the multitude. He who pursues his mournful path undauntedly amid storms, and chills, and blights, will awaken some sympathy and some good wishes. Whatever dispenses the mists of the mind gives some amusement and cheer of spirit. We can accompany a recluse sage in his fate, and in our imagination sit with him in his solitude, and partake his melancholy reflections, his complaints, and his regrets. We are soothed by finding that wisdom and talent are sometimes as weak and helpless as ourselves; and that the haughty frown of genius cannot throw off adversity, and insult, and neglect.

Half mankind are ashamed of their most innocent and virtuous enjoyments till they find that their superiors in endowment are bold to avow them. Thus we are delighted when we find

Gowper relating with *naïve* openness his occupations of making bird-cages and boxes for his tame hares. To me, for many years of my life, a new book by the fireside, shut out from the world, was intense joy and rapture. I know not why, but in these my latter days of decaying memory, books have lost much of their interest; I can occupy myself with more pleasure in writing than in reading.

No one will be allowed to choose his own place in the merit-roll of society: but he is entitled to put forth his claims if he puts them honestly. At first they may be little attended to; but they will, if just, have their weight at last. If it be complained that they are mere *dicta* unaccompanied by proof, it may be answered that, in many respects, such assertions bear internal evidence of their own truth or falsehood. A memorialist is thus justified in bringing into notice many considerations which might otherwise escape a censor. Keeping in full view what are the distinct gifts of mind, a censor can scarcely fail to be able to appreciate accurately the claims set up.

The intellectual powers of man are not given merely for self: they are not intended to aid his own cunning, and craft, and intrigues, and conspiracies, and enrichment. They will do nothing for these base purposes. The instinct of a tiger, a vulture, or a fox, will do better. Genius and abilities are given as lamps to the world, not to

self. I cannot contain my indignation at those vile wretches who contend that a man cannot have sound abilities if they have not taught him to play the part of his own personal interests well.

There is a curious article in the Edinburgh Review on Moore's "Life of Sheridan," written with much thought, but with which I cannot entirely concur. I would cite a few of the passages, but that I do not choose these Memorials should be filled with citations. It is sufficiently apparent, by the extracts from "Sheridan's Fragments," that his earliest ambition and labour was to be a wit; that is, to find out unexpected similitudes and illustrations. I repeat that I consider this a very secondary sort of genius. The great proof of inventive genius is a sustained imagination.

The wings of a true imagination are too often apt to flag for want of enduring strength. Beattie was an instance of this. He conceived a perfect idea of a poetical genius in his childhood; but he could not carry on his beautiful fiction: so that we must consider not only the possession of the higher faculties of the mind, but the degree in which they are imparted.

But we cannot reason others into any opinions we wish to establish:

He that's convinced against his will,
Is of the same opinion still.

We must leave others to think and feel in their

own way. Opinions are taken up from some whim, or secret prejudice, with which reason has nothing to do. The utmost one can hope to do is, to convince himself honestly and conscientiously : then he may gain that self-complacence, without which there can be no enjoyment or comfort. To have no anchor, nor ground to cast it on, but to be always beating about at the mercy of the waves of popular breath, is ceaseless uneasiness and misery. He who shows himself unsteady, invites attack.

Our evil passions render life restless, feverish, and full of disquietudes ; when, if we controul them, happiness is in our power. The first thing is not to be touched by neglect or the false scoffs of the great ones of the world : the next thing is to endeavour to deserve fame ; but not to be anxious about acquiring it. It will fly us in proportion as we are eager in its pursuit. It is a shadow that vanishes in the grasp. All the noise which the world makes about a name is a mere contest between puffing and decrying. These are the battledores that keep the shuttlecock in the air.

After all, why should a man be unhappy if nature has refused him genius or great abilities ? If that is a good cause of unhappiness, all mankind, except a very few, must be unhappy. But it will be said, that it is the ambition of these gifts, without the power, that makes the unhappiness.

So will every unreasonable passion. But then again, "if there be the power, there will be the desire; and yet the power will not command the possession: because fame is notoriously bestowed by caprice or intrigue, and not by merit. The only power to which the world bows,—the only god universally worshipped, is gold. He who loves idolatry or flattery must be rich, and then he will be gratified.

But, alas, whatever abstract wisdom teaches us, the fire of hope, and love of fame, which nature has implanted in our bosoms, cannot be quelled. We pine after it in defiance of all our reasonings. It is a spirit that haunts us, and flits about us incessantly, threaten it as we may. We cannot argue away nature: we are more creatures of passion than of reason.

They who have arrived at celebrity by management and charlatanism can never be at rest; and such are the major part of those who acquire public notice. There must be the addition of some piece of luck to bring the greatest genius into notice. The public never judge for themselves, nor read according to individual taste. Some master-spirit, or some accident, gives the word of command. Popular opinion therefore is nothing more than an echo.

We sometimes observe writings have a temporary sway, which, when the fashion is past, we cannot account for. But this may not unfre-

quently arise from something in the personal character of the author,—some influence he possesses independent of his literary talents, and this often of a political nature. I do not believe that a good author has ever been made by accident. He must have peculiar inborn faculties and gifts; and these will almost always find a vent. What author ever began to be an author late in life? It is not difficult to find matter for the press—such as will satisfy a common reader; but very difficult to find what is essentially and properly good. It must be good in matter, not in style,—which is a minor, and not indispensable, accompaniment. I would prohibit all mocking-birds who have no notes of their own, and then the press would be discharged of nineteen-twentieths of its burdens, and the reader's time and pocket proportionally released. Mere originality, which only differs by error, is indeed mischievous.

A mechanical author, whose whole purpose is to cook up literary dishes highly seasoned, to pamper the popular appetite, is one for whom nature has done nothing good, and who is a dangerous member of society. The minds of the multitude are apt enough to go wrong without being excited onward in their course. Were only good books published, the state of public opinion would be much less unhealthy. But there are no means of repressing the licentiousness of the press without endangering its just liberty. As to deciding merit